

## Son of Irish Seas

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## Son of Irish Seas

by [Siriusfanatic](#)

### Summary

Hector came from humble beginnings, but pirating was always in his blood. Long before he called himself Barbossa he was the abandoned child of Ann Bonny and Calico Jack, looking for a chance to escape his life in squalor and make a life for himself on the sea. He got much more than expected when his island home was invaded by naval captain James Bonny.

### Notes

We're spiraling way back in the history books to the beginnings of our favorite pirates, featuring much of the previous generations histories and how they shaped the lives of Barbossa, Jack, Sao Feng and others.

\*story was originally posted at my old DA page, has been cleaned up and edited and posted here

She stood in the surf with the waves rushing at her feet and burying he toes and heels further into the ebbing sand, while the soft sea breeze fanned her long red hair and kept at bay the humid swelter that was waiting just further up the shore.

It seemed to her that the sound of waves, and flutter of the wind and spray of salt water was the only thing that calmed the now cooing babe in her arms. He was less than two days old, a squirming pink miniature with a shock of fine red hair upon his head, a rounded nose and squinting pale blue eyes.

She wrapped her shawl around him and admired his calm expression, wondering at him. He'd been the very last thing she had expected, and far from what she wanted. Anne had always vowed to herself that she would grow to be more than a nursemaid, weighed down and trodden upon by the responsibilities of her gender. Her unexpected pregnancy had been a curse it seemed, making sailing that much more difficult, and often she had spoken, out of exhaustion and terror, of giving the wretched thing up the moment it had left her. But now as she held him, she was torn.

She didn't hear Calico's approach, but sensed him as he came to stand behind her on the shore, and turned to catch a glimpse of his face. He smiled at her and moved aside her veil of long red hair so that he could look better at the bundle in her arms. He touched the infants head, thumb running lightly over the wispy red hair and noting the strange soft areas of his skull, reminding him how deeply fragile he was. "A son, Anne, I couldn't be more proud."

She didn't answer him, staring from the boy to the ocean. "What's there to be proud of? It's not as if we can take him with us. He would never survive the voyage. We haven't food or supplies for a child."

Calico Jack nodded, scratching the dark hair on his chin, "I told you before that we could put into port for a time, until you're both a little stronger. There's no need—"

She turned to him with accusing eyes, "And you'll leave me there and forget all about me. And what could I do about with a wee babe attached to my teat, eh? Oh now, Jack Rackham, I'm not even giving you the chance to be tempted by such an opportunity."

Rackham bristled a little, as Anne had a way of cutting to his pride like no man could. "You don't think much of me, do you, girl?"

"I think as much of you as any woman should a pirate." She answered somewhat tiredly. "I love you, but I am not as foolish as all that." The baby in her arms fussed a little, his little hand groping for something. Jack let it wrap around his thick finger. "Well, it isn't as if you're the mothering type. Maybe he is better off here." He gave pause then and added; "Can Mary not stay a month or so with him?"

Anne gave pause at the idea, for Mary Read, her female companion and partner, had expressed far more interest in her own son than she did. For all of Mary's gruff ways; she had never known a sailor as hardy or fearsome than Read and few more knowledgeable, she had more tenderness than herself, more compassion. "I had discussed this with her yesterday. She offered to stay with him, but, I do not think it wise to leave such a valuable member of the crew behind, not knowing when we could return." She looked again at the man that would be her husband; "You know as well as I, Jack, that the men respect her. She keeps them in order better than you yourself. She belongs aboard the ship."

Calico glared at her. "So that's it then? You have made your plans, and none of them for him. Have you no consideration for him at all? How unfortunate, my son, to have a mother whom would rather cast him into the sea and be rid of him than to care for him!"

Anne turned away bitterly, angrily and the boy in her arms stared to weep, sensing her distress. She shushed him angrily, and Calico removed him from her grasp, almost fearful she would cast him into the surf and he would be swept away. The boy's feeble cry went on for a few minutes, but the

pirate was able to sooth him back to sleep.

Anne knelt in the sand, letting the water soak her skirts. "I am a wicked woman."

"Not wicked, my dear, no. To tell you plain, you have always been as mysterious to me as the sea herself." The words were meant to console, but Anne could find no comfort in them. "He will stay with Dayana and her husband. And in a year's time, we will return for him."

"And what then?"

The red haired woman cast her eyes out to the horizon, not wanting Calico to see her tears. "Only time can tell." Her heavy words came not out of callousness, nor unfeeling for the child. They came out of years of uncertainty, and knowing that fate could take a strange turn at any time. "Perhaps I shall bring him then to my father, and perhaps he will be good enough to take him until he is of proper age."

Her husband did not know how he felt about this plan; Anne had been raised in good standing, and her father still had plenty of wealth and a good seat in his community. It would be a comfortable life for a time, if not a dull one.

Calico looked at the boy, "He needs a name. A good, strong, sailor's name."

"Hector." She said after a time, looking up at them. "I'll call him Hector."

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Mid-day on the island of Cuba, in a small, seedy, cloistered cove sheltered by heavy palms and waist high ferns edged by glittering beaches; a teaming landscape traveled only by the intrepid or the desperate. Here on the long beaches that formed shoals between them and the jagged rocky reef that kept larger ships from running aground, a small community of buccaneers were scratching out a meager living.

They could scarcely call themselves "pirates" by any true definition. They were a gaggle of runaway slaves, escaped members of Naval and merchant pressgangs, penniless sailors and landless farmers, who found their odds better here than back in their native lands or poverty stricken villages. It was here Anne Bonny and Calico Jack Rackham abandoned their son to the care of others, for good or ill, eighteen years ago.

The man lingered as close to the shoreline as he could get without putting himself directly out in the late afternoon sun, which was dazzling in its severity and scorching to the skin. But the sea breeze rolling in from the growing tide was just enough to cool the sweat on his long pale neck. His hair was damp and sticky at the ends with sweat, which made them curl slightly. He was an easy sight to spot; a ginger haired, fair skinned Irishman among a motley crew of dark skinned Cubans and Haitians and the occasional wayward European scoundrel.

He was a bit awkward, long-limbed and painfully thin like the others, with a long strong chin and rounded bulbous sort of nose that stood out on his face. His eyes were a bit droopy and rounded, and were a brilliant watery blue like the ocean. He stood now beneath the shade of a low palm,

ravenously sucking juice from small mango he had managed to save from their previous meal. The past season had been stormy and difficult, destroying much of their food supply and damaging many of their fishing boats and rafts. Over hunting had left them vulnerable too, so that the growing fear of famine was rising among them. It had never been in particularly plentiful supply, but the fish and the fruit kept them from starving to death. But now in the last two years, their numbers had doubled, while their supplies had only dwindled.

The problem had only been made worse by poor bartering. The island was visited at times by passing ships, who in exchange for fresh fruit and meat would trade them clothes, rum, and sometimes medicine.

Their leader, a former Captain named Jonas Hurwood, had been taken advantage of by a particularly cunning Commodore, whom had taken the bulk of their stores and left them with swill for grog and rum, and blankets and clothing that had once belonged to stricken crewman, which had spread disease quickly among them. There was talk of abandoning the shanty town, and heading further north along the coast, or trying to get across to one of the other islands. Hector was rather keen on this idea.

He hummed a shanty to himself as he ate, juice dribbling down his chin, and buried his feet in and out of the sand, watching them come up again and again, covered in fine glittering grains. One a small crab scuttled across his leg and came to rest on his knee for a time. Hector thought for a bleary moment that it was actually staring up at him. Eventually he brushed it aside, and watched as it vanished into beach again.

A group of raggedy boys ran past him, heading towards the surf, ignoring the shimmering heat in hopes of catching crab or stranded fish in the tide pools. One boy, a bulky blacked-haired English youth about his age sneered back at him with a mouth full of crooked teeth. "What's the trouble, Hector? Afraid to get wet?"

The blue-eyed man leered back at him lazily, "Why trouble m'self with the labor if I have a gaggle of willing monkeys to do it for me?"

The brutish youth, who was dubbed Joseph marched back towards him, shaking his fist and showing a row of scraped and bloodied knuckles. "Hows about I black yer eyes, eh?"

"Come on then if ye think ye be so bold," he sneered back, even knowing where it would land him. The bulky lad lifted him bodily from his seat by the collar of his shirt and shook him about so that he could hardly get his footing before clouting him once about the face with his fist. Even as his nose and cheekbone throbbed, the lankier boy grit his teeth, dug his heels into the sand and grappled the bigger lad about his thick middle and managed to knock him backwards into the trunk, where it's ragged bark tore his back and shoulder blades bloody. The other boys, seeing their mate in trouble, fell upon him in short order, all beating and grabbing at him until he was nearly torn out of his shirt all together and had even sustained a deep bite mark one his forearm from one of the smaller boys.

It was only the bellow of one of the elder men that finally sent the thugs scattering down the beach, knowing that if they couldn't be caught, they couldn't be punished. Hector laid in the sand, trying to shake it out of his eyes and hair, spitting and cursing.

"Idiot boy," the man above him muttered, his accent thick and guttural, twisted with his native tongue and spat out sourly in English. Sebastian was from Jamaica, and had worked on at least four different sugar plantations there in colonies. The story was that he had once had an affair with one of the owners' wives, fathered a few mulatto children with her, and then fled on a boat before he could be executed for what he had done. Hector would have hated to see how he might have raised them, as he had been nothing but a terror to himself ever since he had learned to walk.

"Yer always opening yer mouth when you damn well had ought to keep it closed." He gave the young man a light slap across the lips to illustrate his point. Then he looked down beside him and found them discarded and now ruined remains of mango. His long face dropped into a sour sort of scowl, exaggerating his thick black stubble and jowls. "Ye greedy, wasteful, little white devil. You know what I have told you about this, you know what Captain Hurwood said! Wasting food is worth a whippin'!" He tried to tug off the coarse bit of leather that was around his waist to lash the other man with, but Hector wasn't going to sit there and quietly wait for his abuse. He pushed the other man back hard, knocking him back several steps before he caught his balance. "I'm not yer whipping boy, old man! I'll leave this rock any time I please."

The older man balked at him, laughing loudly and showing off his huge teeth as he mocked him. "Dayana fillin' yer head with that again, is she? Keeps tellin ye that one day you're gonna sail away from here, make something grand of yourself? Fool of a woman. Yer whore mother left ye here eighteen years ago, Hector. What makes you think she's ever coming back?"

This time Hector lunged at him, managing to tackle him into the sand. But the older man had been in more scraps and brawls than Hector had years, and he easily beat the boy back, pinning him down into the sand with his arms above his head and his fist in his face. "Maybe a few hours in the stocks will knock some of that devil fire out of ye. Though I doubt it." He grabbed the other man by the hair and dragged him again, cursing and spitting like an angry cat. He managed to drag him a yard or two up the beach before Hector broke free by kicking the man right in bad left knee and making a run into the jungle.

Sebastian cursed and called after him, but Hector heard only the sound of his bare feet thrumming and thumping across the soft grassy floor. He had run a mile before he stopped, climbing a mossy tree so that he could get a better look at what may or may not be coming behind him, and paused to catch his breath. His so-called father was always more physical when he had been at the rum, but never so much as when they were dry.

He laid his head against the bark, letting his arms wrap around the limb and scowled into thicket of humid green flora that shielded him from the rest of the world for a time, still hearing the roar of the surf beyond. "I hate them all," he muttered to no one. "The whole lot of them; nothing but drunkards, harlots and slack-jawed idiots. I'll haul the lot in, Hurwood and all his crew, just as soon as I get passage aboard a ship."

If only. If he could barter passage aboard a ship, he could get to Port-au-Prince, where he could barter with the French and English sailors there on one of their merchant vessels. And then what? He didn't know exactly what he would do if he ever reached that point. But just to get there. Oh, just to get there!

His stomach clenched and gurgled a little, and he hushed it angrily, knowing he had nothing to give it. He would rather sit out here and starve for awhile than go back to camp and humble himself for a scrawny bit of goat meat that had passed it's prime. With nothing else for it, and his head still smarting from the blows Sebastian and Joseph had dealt him, he curled up in the bend of the trunk which cradled him easily, and fell asleep, waiting for the heat of the day to pass and dreaming of white snowy sails on the horizon that would carry him away from here.

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He woke again to growing dark and the feeling one someone yanking on his foot to gain his attention. He cursed a little, and looked down, only to find the woman called Dayana looking up at him.

"Come down from there," She was Haitian by birth, but her father had been French. She had skin the color of dark toffee and hair that fell in a thick mane that ended below her shoulders, twisted into a heavy braid at the back. She was petite and frail looking, and her dress and corset were slightly too big, making her look even more fragile. Hector clambered down the tree to stand next to her, and she took his face between her rough hands and turned it side to side, checking him for marks. "Ye been fighting with that man again. What good do you think we'll come of it? Haven't I told you to keep away from him when he's goin' on like that?"

"Somehow he always finds me." The young man snorted. He turned away from her and started picking up heavy bits of bark and fallen branches from the ground, testing them for pliancy. He had been collecting materials for a week now, attempting to build a raft of his own so that he could travel down the coastline to the more heavily forested shores lay, still ripe for fishing, and foraging.

"Don't be too hard on him. He's been without a drop of good liquor for neigh eight days, and it makes him a brute. You know he doesn't mean it."

"He means every blessed word." He answered bluntly. He glanced over his shoulder, noting her deflated expression, "It doesn't trouble me, why should it trouble you?"

She lifted her trailing skirts and put her arms around him, trying to hold him as she had when he was a small boy. "You're all the son I'll ever have, that's why. And he ought to love you for that alone. But he's hard man. Life and drink have made him that way."

He put his hand over hers for a moment and then pulled away. "Don't worry about it. I'll get passage on the next boat, and when I've made a living for myself, I'll come back for you. You won't have to scrape out a living on sand anymore."

She smiled and nodded encouragingly, and bent to pick up a few branches of her own for the bond fire.

"He called my mother a whore again." He noted after a time without preamble. "Was she?"

Dayana gave him a pitying look and shook her head; "Yer mother was a fine lady. A sailor, like your father."

"Women don't sail."

"Oh you think you know so much." She chuckled at him. "They say a ship's no place for a woman, but yer mother commanded her own as I recall. She feared no man and didn't live by any of his laws either. Just the Code."

"And what be 'The Code'?"

"It's what Captain Hurwood tries to spout off at times, but he doesn't know it any better than you do. He's no pirate, ol' Hurwood. Just a mad old man without a ship, waiting out the end of his days like the rest of us."

"Pirates have a code?" The idea seemed to boggle the young man. There were many in their company that had claimed to be pirates, and from what he had seen and learned of them, they had never possessed any type of honor or moral center that could scarcely be looked upon as guidelines. She patted his cheek fondly, "As I said, much to learn."

By the time they had gathered two hefty bundles for each purpose, there was little light coming horizon, replaced by the bright orange splashes of flame that came from the bond fires that littered

the sandy coastline. Hector squinted through the trees as he looked beyond the dancing shadows of people coming and going across the beach, to the skyline and what he perceived at first to be oddly formed clouds. "Do you see that there?" he pointed.

The woman squinted after him, her dark eyes widening. "Those are no clouds."

"Sails!" His jubilant expression startled even himself, as he was suddenly filled with the possibility of escape. He dropped his bundle of wood and took Dayana's bony arm, pulling her along eagerly. "The traders must have made it early!"

As they approached the beach, a noise grew. Not the normal din of the crowd, but the shrill, harsh yelps of panic, accompanied by unfamiliar bellows from English voices. As they came to the edge of the trees, they saw their compatriots and kin scrambling across the dunes in raw terror, trying to abscond with whatever they could carry, as armed Naval troops surged the shore, seizing any stragglers they could catch. Hector had never seen such a thing before and was stunned, but Dayana was frantically trying to pull him back into the trees. "A pressgang!"

They were spotted gawking by two sailors, one armed with a musket and the other with a club. "Halt!" they bellowed, running towards them. Dayana tugged him backwards fiercely and finally they turn and ran, the sailors close behind. They tried to lose the men in the thicket, Dayana pushing Hector ahead of her, as the men closed in behind them.

Hector had never encountered this sort of terror before. The sailors that had come before, whatever their origins, had always been more interested in bartering than any kind of violence. If there was any to be visited, it would have been by their own doing, as sometimes Hurwood and his men schemed to steal cargo from their masters, and even their ships. But these men seemed to have come ashore for the sole purpose of catching their tiny village unawares.

Dayana was falling farther behind, losing wind. He turned to tug her along, only to watch as she was struck by a bullet fired from the sailor's musket.

It struck her below the shoulder and she went down in heap, blood blooming across her tea colored blouse like a cloud. Hector was jolted by the sight and stood rooted to the spot, staring down at her, eyes wide and mouth agape. The men were on him then, grabbing and tearing at him in an effort to force him to the ground. He bellowed and clawed at them, wrenching away from their grasping hands and the sharp tips of their bayonets, until one struck him across the nape of the neck with his club and sent him sprawling. They stood over him, gun poised to shoot should he so much as twitch, when someone new approached them.

"I heard shots fire!" A thick English accented man called, his voice somewhat high and stiff. He came towards them then, glaring at them in the dark. "I need live men for the Navy, gentlemen, not corpses." The wounded woman was writhing on the ground, and the ships' apparent captain looked down at her with no small amount of disgust. She whimpered in pain, eyes wide with fear as she tried to scramble away still. "She was trying to escape with this one, Captain," the man with the club answered, motioning to the subdued man at their feet.

Lifting his lantern, the Captain stepped a little closer, peering down. The sight of the captive's bright copper hair struck him mute for a second, so liken was it to the woman he had been seeking for many long years. He crouched beside the lad in the dark, holding the lantern aloft to get a better look at his face. The young man looked back at him with clouded blue eyes, not quite seeing him.

"Do you know him, sir?"

The Englishman ignored the inquiring, continuing to look at Hector with a wondering, appraising

eye. "What's your name, son?"

But the answer was lost on his lips as his head met the ground again and everything was blotted out of memory for a time.

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Hector woke sometime later as if from a bad dream, to the sound of seagulls crying somewhere in the distance, the smell of the sea tide mixed with the wafting scent of palms and tropical blooms and the sounds of men calling and shouting to one another.

But as he opened his eyes, he realized that these sounds were farther off than expected, and that he was not waking up inside his flimsy hammock in their make-shift tent near the tree-line. The ceiling of the room itself caught him somewhat off guard, so much so that he flattened himself and refused to move at first. Having never had a proper roof over his head, the idea now of seeing something as grand and ornate as fresco painting of men, women, and mermaids drifting loftily above his head was enough to give the poor man a shock.

Slowly he crawled from the bed, and took stock of himself. He wasn't hurt anywhere that he could see, other than the large bruise that had formed tenderly at the back of his neck and made him wince when it was touched. This seemed to assure him that he was not in fact dead as he first might have guessed.

The room, in which he found himself the sole occupant, was larger than any he had seen before, and would have housed at least six of the same shabby tents and make-shift shacks which he had resided in his whole life. It was covered end to end in fine plaster, gold filigree tapestries, dark portraits of men and women that to him looked to be Kings or Queens, and a few scattered trappings like chairs, a desk, a rather large mirror and dressing screen and velveteen chaise in dark purple. He padded barefoot around the room, tugging at the strange nightshirt he found himself in and wondering where his own clothes had gone, or where anything had gone for that matter. He passed a pair of thin double doors and he pried them open, allowing a wash of sunlight to fill the room from the newly exposed balcony which over looked the town and docks below.

He stepped outside cautiously, looking about in a daze. He had never seen a city like this, and knew of none close to his home, at least not for many more miles than he had traveled. Below on the cobblestone streets, gentlemen in uniform and other fine attire came and went, some by foot, some in horse-drawn carriages, and not one of them chanced a glance up at the gawking youth staring down at them in wonder and bewilderment. Somewhere in the distance church bells pealed, sending another flock of ocean birds into flight, veering off towards the sparkling blue sea beyond.

"It's a rather stunning view from the hill, isn't it?"

He turned so sharply his feet slipped on the marble and he was forced to grab the rail of the balcony to keep from falling flat upon his ass. The man whom had startled him approached from the opposite door, and Hector recalled him as the one whom had spoken to him on what he guessed was the previous evening. He was of average height, wearing a smooth white wig common to high ranking Naval commanders, and wore a fine tailored jacket and vest in the same colors of his naval uniform. His face was somewhat bland, possessing a rounded jaw and small upturned nose and a pair of somewhat accusing green eyes beneath sharp brows. "For a second time I see that I have caught you off guard. You needn't be so frightened of me, lad."



Hector frowned and rubbed the tender spot at the back of his neck. "Needn't I?"

"I am sorry about that. The crimps can be somewhat brutal about their methods when men run from them. They're used to dealing with a more savage lot, you understand," the man replied, reaching as if to touch the offended spot but Hector slipped his grasp again, backing against the wall. The man gave him a bemused look of pity, "Please, there's no need for that. I promise that no harm will come to you. Tell me, please, what is your name?"

"Hector." He answered at length, looking the man up and down as if trying to riddle him out. "Now I'll ask a question; why did ye bring me here?"

The man was just staring at him with a sort of wistful expression upon his features, his tight-lipped mouth turned up in a smile and bunched his thick cheeks. "Hector. I should have known she would pick such a title. It's not the name I would have chosen for you, but none the less..." He noted the younger man's perplexed expression and chuckled, clearing his throat lightly. "I'm getting ahead of myself, aren't I? You must forgive me, it's just that I've been searching such a long time, and now that I've found you...well, you look just like her."

"Like who?" Hector barked.

"Your mother of course. My wife."

For a moment he stood in silence, face slack and eyes wide, then his lips curled and he scoffed, folding his arms in front of his chest and leaning against the wall. "Ye've shanghaied yerself the wrong man, mate. My mother and father abandoned me years ago on that spit of rock and sand, ne're to return."

At this the Captain sighed and looked to the floor, folding his hands behind his back, "Yes, I had rumors as such. You don't know how it angered me to hear that she had left you in the care of those..." he cleared his throat again and attempted another smile. "I'm sure that she felt it was at your best interest in at the time. In danger as she was, she would not have wished to endanger your life should she be found and arrested.

He stepped a little closer to him, peering closely into his face. "You even have her eyes." Hector tried to flinch away from him again, feeling a faint flush come to his cheeks at this intense investigation of his appearance. "What proof do you have?"

The Captain laughed again in the same tight, airy fashion as seemed fitting of their strange environment. "I can see the proof before me. I received intelligence soon after her untimely departure that she was with child. I searched for her everywhere, I only wanted to bring you both safely back home with me. But, I'm afraid she was afraid I would reject her, so she hid both of you away. I was lost."

"I...don't understand."

"Your poor mother, I'm afraid, fell to temptation by a pirate." He looked away again, this time at one of the portraits upon the wall near the bed. The woman in the painting was pale and pretty, with long red hair, just a shade darker perhaps than Hector's, and the same vividly blue eyes. "That's her. That's my Ann."

Hector stared at the portrait for a time, gazing upon the still woman's face, trying to find some small trace of it in his memory. Dayana had never told him much about her, except for her love of the sea. The Captain's story seemed somehow plausible if not slightly misconstrued.

The Captain put his hands upon his shoulders and gave them a light squeeze; "You're home now, Hector, where you belong."

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Captain Bonny, as he learned, gave Hector a set of fresh clothes and shoes, finer than any he'd possessed, and escorted him about the grand estate on which he found himself. "Is this all yours?"

"Not all," the Captain replied as they walked down the polished wood halls, adorned with similar trappings as Hector's room had been. "I am in the employ of the great Woodes Rogers, whom is my close and personal friend. I live here with him and help him manage his estate, as I'm afraid it's become a bit of a burden for the Captain on his own." He explained, "Captain Rogers is a published writer, a great tradesman, a fine sailor and ever a boon to his Majesty's crown." That seemed like a great deal of accomplishments for one man indeed. "He's even circumnavigated the globe."

Now this peaked Hector's interest indeed, for he had only heard tales of such a feat from passing sailors, mostly by men who were long dead before his time. "Ye seem to be very fond of 'im."

"And you will be too. We'll be having dinner with him tonight."

The idea of food suddenly made Hector's mouth salivate and his stomach rumble loudly; so much that he paused in embarrassment. The Captain raised a sharp eyebrow, "My, that sounds somewhat serious. Feeling peckish?"

"I could eat."

The older man frowned at this turn of phrase, but brushed it off for the moment. "Let us take you down to the dining room then and have breakfast. I'll have the cook make you something."

"Much obliged. I ain't had nothing but fruit and rotten goat for a week."

"Goat?"

Again Hector flinched in embarrassment at the obvious sound of disgust in his new found relation's voice. "I suppose ye don't eat goat around here."

"No. But there is plenty of other meat for you to enjoy. You are a bit malnourished." He lifted the lad's arm revealing how thin it was compared to his own. "To think my only son should go on nothing but rotten meat...well, no more, I assure you."

He escorted him down the grand stairway, into the glittering foyer with his ornate chandelier above their heads reflecting off the hot tropical sunlight, and to the left into another large room where stood a long table that could seat ten or twelve men. Hector plopped down into one of the chairs and looked around, once more confused by his surroundings as servant woman came and brought him a china plate and silver cutlery. The redhead poked at it all with growing wonderment. "What's this for?"

"To eat with of course."

"Well, I recognize the knife, and the fork. But what the bloody hell is this?" He held up a large rounded spoon that would be used for soup. The servant and the Captain both gaped at him like he was a savage. "Oh dear. I can see that this is going to be a very long process, undoing all the

damage." He muttered.

"Is this real silver?"

"Yes, my boy."

The youth admired the sheen of it and the delicate embroidery on its edges. The only tools he had ever used for eating had been made of iron, and were often scuffed and even rusted in places. He brought a bowl of ripe fresh fruit, which he proceeded to dig into with his hands, stuffing as much as he could in his mouth. Juice and pulp ran down his chin and made his fingers and wrists sticky with it. When he paused in his gorging to look up, he again saw his father figure staring back at him, aghast and swallowed hard. "S'rry," he muttered, wiping his mouth on his sleeve for before extending a handful of banana towards him. "Want a bite?"

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Later, after having eaten his fill, and then given a sound scrubbing in a good hot bath and fresh clothes, the Captain escorted him to his carriage, and proceeded to take him on a tour around the city. Nassau was a rich and beautiful place, but seemed heavily divided among itself. The building they passed and the streets they traveled, seemed of new construction, and the gentry were all well-to-do Englishmen and women. Neat little Tudor-style houses lined the streets, marked by shops of all sorts; blacksmiths, tailors, fish mongers, haberdashers and apothecaries, and at least three different taverns where loitered sailors, fresh from their merchant vessels or finely dressed navy men, having just received their earnings, walking about with finely dressed women on their arms. A pair of passing girls eyed him with fluttering lashes beneath wide-brimmed hats and giggled amongst themselves as they passed. He waved to them awkwardly, tugging at the fabric of his bright blue coat and stiff white collar, as if trying to make himself look more presentable.

"Turning heads already?" Captain Bonny chuckled glancing back at him. He lifted himself from the coach for a moment, climbing down to speak more privately with the sailors. "I won't be more than a moment, if you need anything at all, just give old Archibald a tap." He nodded, noting the coachman who nodded back at him with a tip of his hat. But Hector was content enough to just let his eyes drink up the sights, sounds and smells around him.

As the Captain and his company disappeared inside of one of the pubs doorways, he found himself searching the horizon for a better view of the docks and maybe the chance to see one of the big galleons coming into port. Much to Arichabald the coachman's surprise, he found the young man clambering up beside him, standing on the seat with his hand at his brow, shielding his view from the glare.

"Master Bonny?"

This title was so strange to Hector that he didn't even acknowledge it. "There must be fifteen ships in the harbor today!" he mused, mostly to himself with an air of delight. "I wonder where they're all going. Is this port always so busy?"

"It's Nassau, sir, one of the premier British colonies in the Bahamas. At least, most of it."

"Most?"

"Not all the island belongs to the English. There's places were loyalties fare to a different kind of

allegiance."

"French? Dutch?"

Archibald shook his head. "The Brethern Coast."

"The what?"

The coachman tugged him down again by his coat tails and leaned close. "Pirates, mate." He gave a little wink. "But keep that under your hat. The Captain won't like talk of the Brethern. Rumor has it, he's made a plan with Captain Rogers to weed the rats out and be rid of them for good."

"If they share the island, why hasn't he done it before?"

"Too risky." He pointed then down the rolling hills of the island there seemed to be great pillars of stone dividing them from the rest of the town beyond. From the highest hill, he could see that there were indeed houses and people beyond the wall, but they did not seem to possess the same sort of grandeur that these did. And beyond these, the vast lush jungle landscape seemed to reclaim the land, leaving hardly a hint of civilization.

"They hide there, in the jungle. Most men who have tried to make the trek on their own to their city have been lost for days at a time, if they return at all."

This peeked the young man's budding curiosity, so much so that he felt nearly compelled to rise then and follow that decaying path into the jungle and disappear. He was called back to the present however by the sound of his father's voice beckoning to him as he emerged from the pub. "Not thinking of becoming a coachman are you lad?"

"Just admiring the view."

"It is a beauty on a clear day like this." He nodded quickly to the sailors as if to dismiss them, and he watched as they slunk off, casting suspicious looks back at him. As he watched them go, his gaze drifted to a pair of eyes watching him from an adjacent doorway. They were dark eyes, belonging to a servant girl, who was carrying a basket of dried linens. Her eyes reminded him of another's, and he found himself sudden shocked and panicked to realize he had no idea what had become of Dayana, Sebastian or any of the others from the island. He urgently gripped the Captain's sleeve, whom turned to him inquisitively. "Is something the matter, son?"

"Dayana, what happened to her?"

Captain Bonny raised his sharp brow again but he continued on, his voice rising steadily, "The woman I was with on the island! She was hurt,"

James Bonny put his arm around the lad as if to soothe him, "Calm yourself, she is taken care of, I promise you. You needn't concern yourself with her anymore."

This confused the boy as he sat beside the other man, looking back at the servant girl, only to find she had vanished. "She's alright then?"

"Of course! She will be looked after by proper doctors now, cared for and given a proper position in town where she could earn an honest life for herself once she's well. Never fear." He gave Hector another encouraging smile. "I find your compassion for her touching. We'll make a fine gentlemen out of you, that we will. Now, how about a trip down to the docks? Would you care to see my ship?"

"You own your own ship?"

"One of the finest in the Caribbean Sea. Come, there is much to see."

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She was a large schooner, long and fast with lean triangular sails, above which waved the British flag. She had been christened The Duchess looked as though she had seen more than a few grand and perhaps dangerous voyages, as it seemed her hull was being repaired. Hector gazed up at her bow spirit in awe, wishing he could climb aboard and sail the coast, just to see how far from home he had come.

"She was Captain Rogers just a few short years ago. This ship made the first voyage to the Antarctic, quite by accident. The crew nearly froze to death, but somehow, they turned it around. She's been through many adventures. Now she's mine, perhaps someday even yours."

The idea of this made Hector smile so genuinely that it lit up his whole face, and the man beside him was once again struck by how much he resembled his missing wife. "Do you think that I really could sail her someday?"

"Perhaps sooner than you think. I was younger than you when I first went to sea. Have you ever worked on a ship?"

"No...not like this. I've been on a sloop before, for fishing, but that was just for a few miles and never in open water."

"Well, why don't we go aboard then and have a look around?"

Hector didn't have to be asked twice. He rushed up the gang plank to the mild curiosity of its crew, and gaped about at the vast scale of the ship. It was nothing like the big Man-of-War ships he had sometimes seen in the distance, the ones that appeared they could be a floating city unto themselves, but it was still grander than anything he had ever set foot upon. He could feel the sway of the ship in the shallow water by the dock beneath his feet, and feel the cool breath of salty sea air on his face and neck. The constant chatter and call of men as they went about their work was bracing and new, but he revelled in their activities, for the all seemed so sure of themselves in every action. Someone came along beside him then and gave him a hard pinch on his side that made him yelp. "Wot's this? New ship's boy? As we need one o' those..."

"Don't touch me." The red head barked. The cockney sailor tilted his head a bit, his unshaven face shining with sweat, and smirked. "Oy, wait a minute! You're that little bloke what made such a fuss on the island last night. The Captain's forgotten whelp, if that so be the case." He eyed Hector a little closer. "Looks to me like yer a bit young to be his spawn, since his wife up and left for that pirate scum so long ago, eh? How old are ye? Can ye count?"

"That's enough, Edgar." The Captain came to stand beside him, leering at the other sailor with a stern air of superiority. "You aren't paid to gossip. You're paid to work!"

The man snarled in reply, "If I'm paid at all, ye greedy little blighter." But either Bonny didn't hear it or decided to ignore it. He turned instead to Hector again, "Don't mind them. They've been out to sea a long time, and their manners have suffered for it. You'll find that sometimes we are forced to employ men of unsavory character, the only cure for which is harsh discipline. "

"What kind of discipline?" Hector's tongue stumbled over the word slightly, having never quite

heard its particular usage before, but he took it to mean the Captain's way of keeping things in order. Hurwood had done as much, often with the use of bloody brute force.

"Whatever is necessary."

He nodded mutely and looked back out at the water, wondering how far away his cove and his old life really were. "What will happen to the others?"

"The others?"

"Yer men were rounding up the men to work aboard the ship, weren't they?"

"Some, yes. We'll give them good employ, something to do with their wasteful dishonest lives."

"What about the women and children?"

"Hector, those people are of no concern of yours now. You're home with me, where your place should have always been. And soon I hope, your mother will join us."

"You mean she's still alive?"

The Captain gave him a look of muted concern, "You believed that she wasn't? Did they tell you as much?"

"It's just...she never came back." He looked resolutely at the deck, feeling suddenly lost, vulnerable and angry for it. Was his mother such a cold creature, did she really hate him so much? Bonny seemed to sense his distress and turned him back towards the plank, "Let me take you home, there will be plenty of time for this later."

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In the room he had been given, Hector found little solace from his swirling thoughts. What had first been elation had turned to doubt. Captain Bonny had been kind enough to him, kinder than most men he'd encountered, and the more he stared at the painting of his mother, the more he wanted to believe that this was the life he had always been meant for. In that grand estate, hunger, sickness, and fear of death seemed like distant, foreign things.

The sheets beneath his fingers felt strange, the smell of dinner being cooked downstairs by a dozen indentured hands even stranger. This new world was invigorating and wonderful, but also frightening. And he felt he had no one to find a foothold with. He wondered again about Dayana and his stomach knotted. Was she really safe and well somewhere? He wanted to believe so, but he knew he couldn't rest until he knew for sure. Even the welfare of Sebastian and the others began to concern him.

Eventually he rose from the bed and padded out into the hall, unsure of his plan. He wanted to slip away, just for a bit, to see that Dayana and the others were alright. Surely his father wouldn't begrudge him that, if he just wanted to say goodbye and see that they were safe. But as he made his way down the corridors, he swiftly realized he had no idea where Captain Bonny was. Glancing in doorways and testing locks, he assumed sooner or later he would stumble upon the man. Instead, he stumbled upon someone else.

Opening a carelessly closed hinge, he peered inside and found a different man sitting at a writing desk, pouring over volumes of paper. The man, with a head of long dark curls, looked up at him

surprise and mild reproach. "Who goes there?"

Hector fumbled for an answer, and then hastily tried to retreat, only to be beckoned back. "You're him, aren't you? The boy they've been talking about."

"I'm not a *boy*."

The man chuckled and stood with the help of a cane and began to limp forward. Hector saw that the man's foot was oddly misshapen, and when he walked he did not put but the slightest bit of weight on it. As he came closer, he noticed to that the man bore a hideous scar on the left side of his cheek, which made that hemisphere of his face look nearly collapsed below the cheek bone. "No," the man said then, "I suppose you're not." He extended his hand to the stunned and silent youth, "I am Woodes Rogers, and this is my home. You must be Hector. James spoke a great deal of you last evening. I'm glad to see you are feeling better after your run in with the crimps."

Hector shook his hand as the unpleasant memory of being beaten and manhandle came back to him. "Ye look as if ye've had a hard time of things yourself."

The dark haired man chuckled. "Oh yes, yes you might say I have." He pointed to his cheek. "Musket ball to the jaw, was lodged in the roof of my mouth for eight days. And this," he tapped his foot very lightly with cane, "Canon fire, blew off the back of me heel, leaving it in pieces. Most horrific pain imaginable."

Hector grimaced at the idea. "Yer a braver man than I."

"What brings you to my study?"

"I was looking for my uh...father." The words seemed strange in his mouth. "I guess I don't really know my way around."

"Well, my colleague has been temporarily called away, but if there's something you require, perhaps I can help?"

"I was just wondering...where the rest of the men your, uh, 'crimps' as you put it, rounded up might be."

Rogers blinked at him curiously, "My dear lad, were you not told? The rest of those islanders were rounded up and arrested."

"Arrested...why?!"

"For piracy, of course. Captain Hurwood, as I recall, is wanted in several counties for crimes against the crown, including commandeering a ship, highway robbery, and providing aid and information to the Spanish."

"But Hurwood was just an old fart! He doesn't know anything! Between the heat and the salt water I think he went around the bend years ago!"

Rogers attempted to give him a look of pitying understanding, but it succeeded only in making his face look more distorted; "I'm afraid there is a good deal more to think about than just that, Hector. The innocent will not be harmed, they'll simply be relocated to a more hospitable environment."

Hector found himself stepping away in a daze, then turned and ran from the Captain's sight, though he beckoned after him. He took the stairs two at a time, bolting for the door before one of the foot servants could grab hold of him. He ran blindly down the long winding cobblestone path, fleeing in

no specific direction except for where his memories of his afternoon ride lead him. None of the friendly faces he had seen in the light of day were present now in the dark. Faces scowled at him from windows and street corners, coachmen barked at him as he ran, cursing at him all manner of tongues. He neared the docks, looking for some sign of a jail or someplace his imprisoned family might be being held. He turned a corner too quickly however, and found himself bodily colliding with another man. He grunted as he fell backwards, landing harshly upon his ass which made him hiss and wince, and the drunkard he'd collided with turned to see him.

"What's this now?" The man wore a raggedy sailor's uniform that was shabby and stained with rum and other various soiling. He snarled down at Hector with a mouth full of rotten teeth and foul breath as his friends gathered closer to see the trouble.

"Looks like a little lost lamb to me, Edgar." As it turned out, the man with the rotten teeth was the same cockney accented sailor from The Duchess whom had expressed such foul curiosity towards the man earlier.

"Bugger off," Hector muttered, picking himself up only to be thrust back down on the stone again.

"Wot did ye say to me ye little shit?"

Hector sneered, lip curling. "Pardon me, I didn't realize I was speakin' to such fine upstanding gentlemen. *Fuck off.*"

The drunk called Edgar hoisted him up this time by his hair, making him yelp as he kicked and punched out at them, only to be wrangled from behind by one of his gangly friends. "He's a fighter, he is!"

"Good. They like 'im with fight in 'em." Edgar chuckled. "Let's say we take 'im down to the Cay and see what they'll offer for one that's got all his parts and teeth in-tact, eh?"

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The Cay as it turned out, was located beyond the strange stone border between the city that he had seen earlier. It's narrow rows of storm weathered houses and taverns were a far cry from the clean neat lines of other half of the town, and even the nicer establishments looked as if they had been left to fall into a bit of disrepair. Here there was an abundance of the poor, the neglected and the downtrodden. Men and women dressed in bedraggled clothing, with drunks and prostitutes openly roving the sidewalks and street corners, laughing and screaming, jeering and bellowing at himself and each other with witless abandon.

He was dragged, still struggling between the two men who held him, into a darkened tavern, where he was swept off to a store room and flung upon the floor in a heap, his hands and knees smarting from the blow. "Curse ye, ye inbred sons of pigs! I'll knock out the rest of yer rotten teeth and use 'em for—!" His ranting was cut short by the approach of a heavy-set Inn Keeper who was wielding a rather dangerous looking lash in his right arm. "Where'd you find this little prick?" the big man sniffed, looking down at him. "Thought you liked to bring 'em to me drunk and half dead?"

"This one strayed in our path. But I'll want double my usual price for 'im. Comes from good stock, this one."



"That so?" The Inn Keeper mumbled, glaring down at Hector with glazed eyes set deep in droopy sockets. He returned his gaze with a reproachful stare and tried to get to his feet, only to have the man stretch his lash between his thick hands in warning. "Ye sit tight. I'll be fetchin' a buyer shortly. Any ruckus and you'll be going without most of yer skin, that clear?" He turned and disappeared out the door, leaving it guarded by Edgar, who was picking his nails with the tip of his knife. Hector scowled at him, "And what will you say to my father when he sees I've gone missing? What then, eh?"

"That you lit off like a thief in the night."

"He won't believe you."

"Who's going to tell 'im otherwise, eh?"

As he laughed, certain he had gotten away with what very well could be murder, Hector cast about for any sort of way out of the dingy little room. It was lined with heavy crates and barrels, dusty old bottles of rum and wine and a few tools. The nearest to him seemed to be a rusty crowbar that was probably used for opening crates. Hector sat upon the floor, pretending to nurse a twisted ankle, and the moment Edgar's watery eyes left him, he was up, darting for it. The limey yelped and started after him, wielding his knife. Hector grabbed the crowbar, and turned, swinging blindly. He missed the first swing, and earned a ragged cut across his arm for his trouble, but as his arms came back around, he clouted the man squarely in the face, sending him sprawling backwards, spitting blood and teeth. The commotion brought the Inn Keeper back with a vengeance, and not alone this time. A slighter figure followed behind him, one with thick black hair and tanned features that was wielding a short sword in one hand and a pistol in the other.

"Back!" Hector snarled at them, still wielding the iron bar like a club. "Or I swear I'll beat yer brains in!"

The figure behind the Inn Keeper fired a pistol shot, which struck the tip of the iron. The vibration made Hector's hands throb and he dropped the thing as he bounced from his grasp. Wincing at his palms, he hadn't time enough to recover before the deafening crack of that lash came down upon his chest and shoulder, ripping fabric and leaving a hot, angry and bloody welt across the exposed skin of his neck and collar bone. He screeched with the pain of it and dropped to his knees, doubling over and clapping a hand to the burning, bloody mark. The lash would have fallen on him again, but the pirate with the pistol turned her weapon upon the Inn Keeper in warning. "Enough!" Through Hector's haze of pain, he noted that the man's tone seemed slightly off. The pirate approached him, and tipped his chin up with the tip of his blade.

Looking into his face, Hector saw to his surprise that it was no man at all, but a woman gazing down at him. She had not the same delicate features that he had seen on many of the other ladies of port; she was deeply tanned by the sun, and her black hair was a voluminous cluster of untamed curls that were tied in a short ponytail at the nape of her neck, yet some managed to escape at all angles around her face, restrained only by the feathered tri-corner hat perched upon her head and pulled low over her brow. She wore men's clothes that did well to hide her figure, though up-close Hector could better see curvature of her body, and might have been fooled completely were it not for how large and soft her dark eyes were.

"Christ," she swore softly as his eyes caught hers. She dropped the blade from his neck and stared at him in disbelief, and Hector grit his teeth and muttered; "What are ye lookin' at me like that fer, wench?"

Hearing his voice made her smile and she laughed a bit, crouching down beside him and peering closely into his face. "I'm not going to hurt you, luv. Not now that I see what you are." She pulled

his hand from his neck and winced at the bloody welt left there. "Come up, we'll see to that." But as she tried to lift him, he flinched away, keeping his head down. "Keep yer hands and yer pity to yerself!" he barked.

She sighed, "Stubborn too, eh?" She leaned back towards the door and bellowed, "Jack! Get your sorry drunken carcass in 'ere! I be needin' a hand with this one!"

A moment later they were joined by a new man. He had a head of shaggy red-brown hair that dipped down to his shoulders, loosely trimmed beard in the same rusty color, and wore a coat of calico fabric, the colors of which had run and blended with time and sea spray creating a strange effect in the light. He also wore white stockings as he'd seen on French sailors, which seemed to stand out oddly from the rest of him. "What is it? One little runt giving you trouble, Read?"

"I think you should see him for himself, and then we should take him with us."

"Yer set to buy?"

She beckoned him a little closer and leaned up closely to speak to him, "This one's worth more than gold."

"I'll be the judge of that," the man called Jack grunted before finally turning his gaze upon the battered prisoner upon the floor. Whatever it was that Read had managed to spot about him almost instantly took Jack a bit longer to comprehend, and when he did, he seemed slightly less pleased, if not more stunned. "Can't be," he muttered.

"He has her eyes and your nose, ye git! How can ye not see it! And that hair!" Read muttered back, smacking his shoulder in frustration.

"Shut up!" Hector found himself snarling at the two of them as he struggled to get his feet. "I'm bloody sick of all this whispering this and that about me! I've had enough to last me a bloody life time! Touch me again, either of ye, and you'll be swinging from a rope when Captain Bonny finds ye!"

This made both pirates stand somewhat still for a moment, and then face of the man called Jack's darkened. "I imagine we will. But not by any doing of yours." He reached and managed to grab hold of Hector, lifting him from the floor. The redhead bellowed, cursed and kicked, battering the stronger pirate with his hands and his feet. "Dammit, Mary, subdue 'im! He's like a fuckin' hell cat!"

"Just like his mum!" She reached around and smothered a foul smelling cloth across his face, and Hector's head seemed to drift away on the tide as he slumped over Jack's shoulder and was carried off without further protest.

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He did not know whether it was a dream, or the faint blurry edges of reality that slipped in and out of his grasp between bouts of senselessness and dark; but he thought he saw thick jungle and a winding trail that weaved in and out between rocks and trees, never keeping to a straight course, and the faint light of burning torches, and mutters of men and the noises of animals somewhere in the deep green void of the island.

There was nothing after that for a short time, and when his head cleared and he broke the surface of consciousness again, it was to the feel of water on the painful marks on his neck and chest. Someone was washing him with a rag, humming quietly.

"Ah, there you are." He recognized Read's voice more than her face, as she had shed some of her manly disguise and let her hair down so that it covered her exposed shoulders. In this manner, she was actually very fair, and it puzzled him at how easily he had first been fooled. "Stings god awful, doesn't it? That fucking blighter used to work as quartermaster in his day, and as you can see, he kept some of the practices. Should have cut his eye out for this."

"I fail to see how it matters to you," he mumbled, his tongue feeling like mush from the drug she had smothered him with. He tried to sit up but she laid him back down with a firm but gentle hand.

"Take your time with that. Getting up and running now would only put ye back on your ass for all your effort."

"Ye can't keep me here." He replied, but there was little conviction in his voice on the matter. He was just too tired and too sore to put up much of a fight presently. He felt like he had been fighting forever.

"You're free to come and go as you like. We would have invited you proper, but you didn't seem to be much in the mood."

"Can ye blame me?"

"I guess not, Hector."

He peered a bit more closely at her. "You know my name?" She smiled at him in a strange, sad way that was nothing at all like how the Captain had smiled at him when he'd discovered the same. Hers was much sadder, much more wistful in a manner that seemed to brush the surface of some deep well of emotional turmoil. "I was there when it was given to you."

He laid there passively staring at her, trying to make her words come together. "You knew my parents then?"

"I still know them. I still love them."

"Then why did you take me away from him?" Now it was Mary's turn to look confused. "That bastard what brought me to that piss pot, he caught me on the street. My father thought I was safe at home."

"Lad, your father ne're laid an eye on you before I did in that store room."

"Then you're mistaken. Captain Bonny is father."

At this Mary's face darken and she rose from his side, drawing a dagger from her belt before stabbing it deeply into the wall above his beside, carving a deep wound into it. "That wig-wearing prick is no blood of yours! What lies has that snake been tellin' you?! How did he even find you, is what I'd like to know!" Her demanding tone irritated him so that he pushed himself up, glaring at her as he yanked her knife from the wall and cast it aside. "Ye've got a lot of questions for me, lass, but I've got more than a few of my own. Till yesterday I was a bastard orphan of some whore and a pirate. Than out of bloody nowhere the bleedin' Navy comes stormin' the beach, wrangling me like a wild pig. Then I'm told by the Captain that my mother lit off with another man and left me behind. But the Captain found me, not her. He searched for me, not her!"

She gave him that pitying look again and it only made him angrier. "I've had enough!" He stood abruptly, took two shaky steps and then sagged to the right. Mary reached out and caught him easily, holding his thin frame up with little effort.

"He's got your head all twisted around," she sighed, settling him back upon the bed and pinning him down easily with one hand. "But we'll set it straight, luv, not to worry."

"Bugger off," he muttered, hand clamped over his eyes to stem the spinning he felt whenever he opened them. She leaned over him and he felt her hair tickle his skin and smell her scent of sweat, salt and jasmine oil as she kissed his forehead softly.

"Jack will be up in bit. Maybe he can explain better than myself." She left him alone then and he laid there for a time, waiting until he felt steadier before attempting to rise again.

By the looks of the place, he guessed he was in another sort of Inn, though he doubted it could be the same place he'd just come from. He pulled himself up and made his way towards the nearest window, which was open to allow the breeze in. Whatever the building was, it perched not twelve yards or so from the shore, and even in the dark he could see his way out across the sloping dunes and battered shacks to the glittering beach and withering docks beyond. A slew of ships were gathered here, but they did not look anything like the ones that sat in the harbor by The Duchess and her ilk. Many of these boats were smaller, sloops and Chinese Junks, the biggest of which was a double mast brigantine, her sails billowing faintly in the breeze as she drifted just off shore.

"Where the bloody fuck am I now?" he sighed to no one, not expecting an answer. Retreating briefly from view, he made his way to the door and tested the handle; not to his surprise he found it locked. He listened for a moment or two and could hear more than a few voices beyond accompanied by the clinking of glass wear and the sound of boisterous singing. He turned then back to the window and peered out at the drop below. It was too high to make a straight drop; he break a leg or worse hitting the uneven road below. But the first story roof was just slightly to the right, and if he could swing his way out and land upon the ledge, he could climb down from there without much trouble. Sighing heavily, he perched himself uneasily upon the window sill, hoping he wouldn't be spotted on the process.

Taking a deep breath he gripped the edge of the window and leapt hard to his right, emitting a yip of fear as his feet struck the shingles of the roof, which caused them to dislodge and slide beneath him. It was only by luck and instinct and he reached out and grabbed the steeple of the roof with both hands as the bit beneath his feet gave way and went clattering to the road below.

"Ow, ow, bugger fuck...!" he hissed, feeling all his aches and wounds throb in protest to the stretching and scraping they suffered. "Well Hector, ye wait all your bloody damn life for one interesting thing to happen to ye, and this is the answer ye get..." The shingles beneath his fingers gave way then and he went sliding downward, falling to the ground below and landing painfully in a tall bit of dune grass that did nothing to break his fall.

Winded, he lay there just staring up at the window and waiting for something else to fall and crush him, as seemed fitting. Instead he heard footsteps approaching him and as the pirate came to stand over him, blinking down in amusement.

"Well, that was an amusing little spectacle." The man called Jack chuckled before reaching down and helping the bruised man up to his feet again. To his surprise, the pirate did not try to hold or restrain him, but instead stood back, looking him over with an air of great amusement as he stroked his beard and mustache. Hector noticed the large gold and ruby ring he wore on his right forefinger, which was crested with a lion's head. It alone was probably worth more money than Hector had ever seen.

"You're not used to being contained, are you?"

"Ye might say not."

"I can admire that in a man."

"How nice for you."

The pirate extended his hand, "Captain Jack Rackham. Calico Jack to those who know me best." Hector refused it, but this didn't seem to bother the man, who only smiled more. "I'm not surprised at all you tried to run. I would have done the same in your place. I don't like being confined either."

"Then there won't be any hard feelin's if I request ye take me back where ye found me."

"To the pub?"

"To the island!"

"But we're still on the island, Hector. We've never left."

Hector looked around again, but the town that had cropped up around him looked nothing like the glittering jewel of Nassau port, and there was no sign of the fine houses, or his father's manner house high on the hill, or the clean white sails of The Duchess anywhere. "All you see belongs to us, as it did before the Governor Rogers decided to settle and take what they wanted for King and Country and to hell with everyone else. But they can have their little port for now. It'll be as it was before soon enough."

"By that I assume ye mean to take it from them." Hector replied. "Why would ye tell me this? Unless...yer going to kill me before I could go back to warn him."

"I would never lay a hand on you in anger, and certainly never to strike you down." Rackham said, and his voice took on such a tone of sincerity that seemed unlike him that Hector could not help but listen. "I believe that if you hear me out, there'll be no need."

"I find that hard to believe." He answered, folding his arms across his chest. "What is it ye want with me anyway? And don't go on about me being some lost kin to ye, because I don't believe that either. Nobody wanted me for eighteen blood years, why the hell should I believe ye'd all come crawling out of the woodwork now?"

The pirate sighed deeply, "You have a right to your anger, so I'll let ye have it for now." He looked out the shore again, "Feel like some fresh air?"

Hector followed the man at a short distance, always keeping his eyes peeled for possible escape routes should he decide to run. There seemed like a dozen places to hide among the twisted dirt and gravel paths that lead up from the dunes, in fact the whole town seemed to be designed like a labyrinth, full of twists and turns so that any unwary stranger would instantly become lost and confused. But Rackham seemed to be an old hand, and knew the way by heart. He lead him down to the beach where there were campfires blazing and men, women, small children and even goats danced and played by tide, eating fresh fish and crab from the water out of giant kettles and stew pots, washing it down with ale and wine.

It reminded Hector of the home he had so long taken for granted, and his mind drifted towards Dayana and her fate again. "I should have been at home," he said, looking at the fire. "But I had to find her."

"Her?"

"The woman who raised me. Our beach was raided by the Navy, they took her and the others away. I was told they had been arrested for piracy."

"They have. Or most of them."

"Wait, you know them?"

"Aye." To Rackham's surprise the youth gripped him by the lapels and practically shook him, rattling the beads that dangled from his neck and his belt.

"Where are they? Tell me, I have to find her! She was hurt in the raid and I—I just need to know she's alright."

"I'm afraid I can't give you that assurance, but I can take you to some of the refuges, who may know what happened." He led him down beach to one of the many tiny encampments. Here he came across a gaggle of scrawny men he recognized from his home, including Captain Hurwood himself. Somehow the cunning old bastard had managed to elude capture, while others were imprisoned in his place.

"Hector!" the old man crowed waving a hand at him. "Good to see you, boy, good to see you!"

"You old bastard!" Hector grabbed the man by the shabby wrinkled collar of his coat and pounced on him, knocking him back into the sand. "It's your fault those vultures came down on our heads! Where's Dayana, what happened to her?! Where is she!?"

Rackham pulled him away from the old man, who was sputtering and wheezing in the sand.

"Mercy, mercy! I don't know, I don't know what happened to her or the others. They rounded up the women and children separately from the men. I-I didn't see!"

"Now boy, let 'im be. He'll be as much use to you as torn sail, I'm afraid. Better ask some of the others," he pointed down the encampment to some shivering women who were watching him wearily. As he departed to speak to them, Rackham took a long look at the grizzled and withering Hurwood. "By God yer a pitiful sight. Are ye proud of yerself, old man, living off the backs of a few castaways and escapees all this time without so much of as a thought of what you would do if they ever found you?"

"They didn't come lookin' for me," grumbled the old pirate, "They came lookin' for you and your lass and ye know it, Calico! That damn bleeder Bonny is ruthless, and if he ever catches you here, you'll be strung up so high it'll take ten men to cut you down."

"The Brethren will have their say about that." He answered, "Or did ye forget I answer to a higher Court than that of the King?"

"Yer lookin' to them for protection now? Thought you didn't need them, thought the buccaneers of the Coast would be enough to save ye?" the old pirate chuckled grimly. "They just may let ye hang for not comin' to them sooner."

He gruffly battered the man on the shoulder, knocking him back into the sand, turning then to go after Hector.

He watched his son with a wistful eye, torn by what to do next. He knew so little about him, and felt so far from his world and his experience. Now it had crumbled all around him, leaving him with nothing. Did he dare, now, after so long reach out a hand to guide him, as he should have all

along? He and Ann had always told themselves that he would live a better life without them; that piracy could bring their only child nothing but pain and strife. If they were ever caught by the powers that stalked them so fiercely, he would be left with nothing, given over to an orphanage or a church, where he would just be one of dozens of waifs that would be neglected and forgotten until some form of death claimed him.

How much would the boy hate him if he knew whom he really was? And how could he convince him of the truth, after the lies James Bonny had been filling his head with? Yet even now Jack wondered if the lie was not better for him. As long as Bonny believed, and he must, that Hector was indeed his own child, the boy was safe. James was so twisted with his own sense of entitlement and accomplishment that he would do nothing to harm what he perceived to be his prodigy. But if he learned that Hector was indeed conceived by a pirate; a traitor and deserter of the crown...? He'd show him no mercy.

Finally the young redhead came trotting back towards him, looking discouraged. "She's not here, no one's seen her. Could she have been left behind?"

"She might have been fortunate enough to escape capture, but if she was wounded as you say, I can't be certain."

Hector dropped into the sand tiredly, staring out into the surf. "Did she mean so much to you?"

"She was all I knew. Now I have nothing."

Calico looked upon the boy with great remorse, and before he could stop himself, dropped to the sand beside him and put his arms around him. "Not nothing."

Hector sat in his embrace, stunned by it, until eventually the older man pulled away, looking awkward and embarrassed for his trouble. They did not look at each other for a few moments, neither knowing what to say, then Calico drew him up from the beach. "Come on, let's have us something to eat at the Inn and you can decide where you wish to go from there."

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They sat together in a dark secluded corner of the pub, away from the loudest bits of noise and revelry and ate fresh fish and salted pork with beans and rice and drank rum from dented old tankards. "You treat your prisoners well," Hector said after a time.

Calico smiled at him under the thick line of his mustache, "Oh, if you were a prisoner, lad, you would know it. You're my guest and I expect you to behave as such."

"Do you always buy and sell your guests and before spiriting them off into the night?"

"Only the very special ones," the pirate answered with a wink and took another drink. "But a word of caution; if ye be thinking of escaping, please do so by sea and not land. She'll be kinder to you than the jungle if you wander off the path. Which would be easy, seeing as how the path is only in memory and not visible to the eye."

"I'll make a note of it." He looked out across the crowd, eyes roving over the sea of faces. The pirates seemed to come from every creed and port, French, English, Irish, Dutch, Spanish, and more than a few of them were native islanders, or former slaves. Here, as it had been on the island, the pirates treated every creed with the same measure of tolerance, though some feuds remained.

"Every man what earns his keep has an equal share," Jack explained. "We don't keep to the old creeds like so many of our former countryman do. We serve a different crown now."

"And what crown be that?"

"Ever hear tell of the Brethern Court?"

The redhead shook his head dimly. "Ah, now there's a tale worth the tellin'! There's a great history of pirates, Hector, goes back longer than even these old geezers can remember now. Back then it was every faction and every man for himself, often against powers we couldn't even fathom. Oh, I'm not speaking of the likes of navies and royal fleets. I'm speaking of Gods, of creatures and demons that rise from the depths to make miserable the lives of man."

Hector eyed him, wondering how drunk the man was, but Jack shook his finger at him. "Don't go lookin' at me that way, boy. I know what I speak of. In any case, it was the first Brethren Court what came together and tamed the seas for man, taking it for themselves. How was done exactly, I don't know. That was many life times before mine. But since that day, the court has continued, and has laid down laws and codes by which all free sailors live."

"If you are free, why do you need laws?"

"All men need laws. We're wicked in nature, you see. Without laws, I could shoot that fella over there dead, and what of it?"

"So you're really no different than anyone else."

Jack gave him a reproachful glare. "Give us a chance, lad. Ye don't know nothing about the way a true pirate operates. Yer just as daft and misguided as the rest, thinking we're just a bunch of blood thirsty thieves and cut throats. Not so, I say! A pirate ship is the best any sailor could hope for, spared the cruelty of the King's yolk. Those poor blighters might spend years at sea without ever seeing land, and should they survive the voyage, are often not even paid for their trouble. Or ye could take your chance with a merchant vessel, whom be slightly less cruel but no less greedy and heartless when it comes to welfare of the sailor and his kin. Ask any of these poor besotted blighters here, and they'll tell you the same. Pirating be the only way a sailor can be free to make his own way in the world."

"I've heard pirates are cruel and vicious murderers, who slaughter, pillage, and rape without so much as batting an eyelash."

"Some are."

"Don't they keep to the Code?"

Jack rolled his tired old shoulders, his lavish coat looking bronze and gold in the lantern light. "Some men believe they are above the law, no matter what it be. And those are the ones you need to look out for, Hector. If there's anything less merciful than the crown; it's a rouge pirate."

Hector took this all in with a grain of salt, half fascinated, half disbelieving and feeling the beginnings of drunkenness tingling at the base of spine, making him feel relaxed and sleepy. "And what kind of pirate does that make you, Captain Rackham?"

The older man leaned back in his chair, hat tipped low over his brow and a cocky smirk that seemed somewhat familiar playing across his lips; "I'm the best kind of pirate, lad. This island is home to so many of our ilk that it takes a separate branch of governing pirates to keep things running smoothly. We call it The Brethren Coast. And you're looking at the man in charge, as it



were."

"I doubt that." Hector chuckled into his glass. "If you were, why would you be sitting here with me, drinking watered down rum?"

"If you must know," Jack said, leaning a bit closer. "You're of great interest to me, Hector."

"And how be that?" there was a coldness in the young man's voice that made Jack's heart ache again. "If I've had my way of it, you'd have sailed the world over already, seen all its riches and wonders. I'd a made you a Captain in your own right, and brought ye before the Court for testimony, and they would have welcomed you with open arms."

This talk made Hector feel uneasy, for it was a speech he had heard once before already. He stood up then, not looking the older man in the eye as he did. "I think I'd like to go home now."

Calico sighed heavily, "You really want I should return you to the Governor's home?"

"I don't stay with the Governor, I stay with Captain Bonny and Captain Rogers."

"Captain Rogers is the Governor. And Captain Bonny his informant." Calico replied at length, watch as this washed over his guest. "Did they fail to mention that little detail?"

"Informant for what?"

"Woodes Rogers is a pirate hunter, Hector. And he has his sights set on your very own mother."

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They returned to their rooms, Hector saying nothing for a long time. Calico let him have his silence, waiting for the boy to ask the questions. They came upon Mary, who was attempting to mend a hole in one of her boots. She looked relieved to see the two men together; "Well, here I thought you had lit out for good. I'm glad to see I was wrong."

"What of the crew, Mary? Are they keeping their heads?"

"No more than you," she mocked, rolling her eyes at her Captain and occasional lover. "Miggs is on watch; so far there's no sign of trouble from the Port."

"That's saying something. They must not have realized you are missing." He said looking to Hector, who said nothing. "And any sign of The Kingston?"

Mary shook her head sadly, "Not made it to port yet, I'm afraid."

"I hope she hasn't met with trouble."

"If she has, Ann can more than handle it on her own."

This at last made Hector perk up, looking between the two of them, "My mother? She's coming, here?"

"Aye," Jack grunted, removing his hat and tossing it upon the chair along with his long coat and sinking down on the edge of the large bed, kicking his feet up and resting them in Mary's lap, who glared at him in response before slapping them away. "It's about time I saw my wife again. Been

gone several weeks to the Windward Passage she has."

"Your wife?"

Mary looked from Hector's startled features to Rackham and her pretty features were hardened again into those lines that made her look more androgynous, not to mention deeply disapprove. "You worthless cad, you've still not told 'im? Are you a coward then as well as idiot?"

"Hold your tongue, woman."

She drew her dagger and held it dangerously against his inner thigh, keen to slice what was between; "Call me that again and I'll make you one as well."

He chuckled in reply, though he knew well she could make good on her threat whenever she pleased. The dark-haired woman turned instead to Hector, "I'm sorry to tell you, luv, but this good for nothing sea dog is your father. You were born at sea off the coast of Cuba, which is where you were given over to the care of Dayana and her husband."

Hector turned away from her, staring shakily around at the sparse trappings of the room, feeling himself sweat. "And be that the truth?" he muttered. "I doubt ye'd know the difference."

"Hector, please, try to understand..."

"I'll 'please' nothin'!" he barked back at them. "Take me back to the Captain!"

"You don't belong there."

"And I do here? What is it ye want with me anyway? Need another hand aboard yer ship? Two days ago, I'd have gone with you, no matter what story ye told me. But now..."

Mary looked at him piteously. "It's too dark to travel tonight; the tide's up and the rocks are dangerous. If you really want to go back, we'll take you at first light."

Hector nodded faintly and ascended the stairs and disappeared into the room above them where he had woken earlier. The two pirates watched him go, Rackham sighing deeply and hiding his hand beneath his face. "I can't let him go back there. If Bonny ever discovers he's mine, he'll hang him just as sure he stands."

"You have to convince him, Jack. You owe him that much. You both do."

"The sooner Ann arrives the better," The pirate rolled and hid his head beneath his pillow, seeking sleep.

Mary slapped his ass sharply as she stood; "Lazy lout, always leaving your work to yer women. Never seen a sorrier sort than you, Jack Rackham."

He peeked out from beneath his pillow at her; "Oh come on, lass...you and I both know you're aching to see that woman just as much as I."

The brunette smiled as she laced up her boots and dawned her own jacket and hat; "That's why I'll be waiting for her at the docks. You stay here and keep on eye on your whelp."

"That's not fair!"

"Ah, but we took a vote on it while you were gone, oh Lord of the Brethren Coast, and you sadly, missed your chance to vote. A pity." She turned to the door and was gone, a little skip in her step that left Jack somewhere between amused and scathingly jealous.

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Mary watched the ship come in on the black tide, lit only by its lanterns and the lights upon the dock. From the grand vessel, which was large enough to hold a sizable crew of twenty, but still small and sleek enough to outrun any English Man-of-War they might encounter, came one of her rowboats, which held naught but three people.

As it reached the dock, the man at the foremost end tied her off, while the other two climbed aboard. The second sailor approached Mary in the dark, squinting to see. "That you, Mark?" the sailor called with a less than masculine tone. Mary, or "Mark", as she was sometimes known in disguise, swaggered forward with hands on hips, smirking beneath the brow of her hat. "Depends on who's asking."

The second sailor met her with a grin, drawing away the bandana that held her long loose hair from her head, revealing a long tumble of ginger red hair that fell down her back and shoulders. Ann was taller in Mary in stature, but thinner in frame, and her features had always been softer and more narrow than that of man's. She wrapped her arms around Mary and kissed her deeply, allowing the smaller woman to actually dip her slightly. The other men looked on in disinterest; this was a sight they had seen far more than once aboard their vessel.

When the two broke away, they embraced tightly before turning, arm-in-arm to make their way up the dock and back into the village. "Any trouble?"

"Not a breath," Ann answered, scratching her sweaty, salt-crusted hair, aching for a hot bath. "For some reason the Navy seemed wholly occupied elsewhere, and for that I'll thank them. We would have arrived sooner except that we came upon a storm off Galveston which waylaid us a day or so." She paused to look at her lover, "And how is Jack? Keeping out of mischief for the time being?"

"Keeping your husband out of trouble is a full time job," Mary replied, "But we've come across an interesting development in Nassau."

"Oh? What be that?"

Mary grinned slyly, "What's that information worth to ye?"

Ann rolled her eyes, "Come on, luv, out with it."

"Oh no, no, no. I not be so easy to please as all that, Miss Bonny. I have a price, and you know it well." She tightened her grip around the woman's middle, cinching the loose tunic and coat a bit tighter around her figure, which caused it to pull open a bit further at the collar, exposing the top of the pale Irishwoman's breasts in the torch light.

"I stink," Ann protested half-heartedly.

"We'll have a bath first. Then we'll discuss terms."

"You're spending far too much time with Jack. You're starting to sound like 'im."

She leaned in and pressed a few light kisses upon the pale woman's neck. "He could learn a thing or two from Mary Read, in my opinion."

They laughed together as they made their way up the road, waving to companions and associates as they passed. But as they approached the Inn, Mary's lusty and lighthearted tone dimmed and she suddenly looked pensive, perhaps even nervous.

"Something wrong, m'luv?"

The dark eyed woman cast her gaze to the upper window, where she knew Hector was inside, hopefully sleeping. "There's something you should know, and I was going to surprise you, but now I think it best I say it here so that we can be frank about the matter."

This seemed to perplex Ann. "What is it? Has he done something?"

"It's not about Jack. It's about...your boy."

At first Ann didn't seem to understand, then her freckled features paled and she turned aside, biting her nails as she sometimes did in moments of stress. "What of it? Was there some word from Dayana?"

"He's here, Annie. Hector is here."

For a moment she seemed to stop breathing all together and stood staring in the dark with wide eyes before exhaling and looking upon Mary with an emotion that was too muddled to truly define in words. "How can that be?"

"Your former husband raided the Cove. People are scattered, some jailed, some missing, probably dead. He was caught and brought here. And that wicked man recognized him for yours and has been filling his head with all sorts of lies."

"No!" The idea that James Bonny had been anywhere near her only son seemed to disgust and terrify the woman. "Has he harmed him? If so, I'll reach down his gullet and pull out that craven chicken heart of his from the inside!"

"He's not harmed him! He doesn't know what he is. He believes, rather stupidly, that Hector's his."

"Ha! That would be a miracle indeed! Ye can't bear a child from the lack of seed or manhood that is possessed by that cretin."

"All the same...it's not as if he's been handed the facts on the matter. He's a lost soul, Annie. And I've got to know, right here and right now, what you mean to do with him. Because if you're going to turn aside again, then it's best you just let him go on believing what he does. He might be happier for it."

"What are you saying? That I should let that scoundrel just--?"

"I'm not telling you what to do. Only that he deserves more than what you and Jack have given him so far. And if you're not going to go to him now, then it would be a far better thing to let him go on without knowing you. Do you understand?"

The woman beside her looked torn between anger and distress, and after a moment of obvious internal struggle, she made for the door of the Inn. "I want to see my boy."

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The knob turned over and she stepped inside, only to suddenly have a pair of arms encircle her, trying to cover her mouth and smother her scream. She was lifted from her feet and swung to the side. In the light of the room, she discovered that they had been beset upon by a gang of heavily armed officers from Nassau port, who had taken the Inn by storm in an ill-conceived raid.

The lot of drunken patrons sat at their tables, hands raised, glaring about at one another and the men who so boldly thought they could hold them there at gun point. The door was knocked closed behind them, and Ann realized that Mary hadn't been snared. This gave her some hope as she turned to lay her eyes upon the proposed leader of the operation; a man she knew more by reputation than any other.

Woodes Rogers limped forward from the middle of the room, holding his own sword in hand as he approached her and the men who held her. "Ann Bonny, is it?"

Her mouth was uncovered and she spat on the floor at his feet. "Aye, what of it!?" she barked back. "Ye've a lot of damn nerve comin' here, you powdered pompous prick! This be Brethren territory, and you have no sway here!"

"For now, ma'am." Rogers answered politely, not forgetting his manners in the presence of a lady. "But I haven't come on official business this night, or I would have brought a good deal more force."

"How did you find this place?"

He attempted a smile, which made the deformed side of his face seemed more exaggerated. "Let's be honest with each other, my dear, we have a good deal of traitors on both sides, do we not? Men that can be easily swayed by drink and gold?"

She couldn't argue with that, though it burned in her belly to think that they could be so easily exposed by one drunken greedy bastard with a loose tongue. "Your husband has been searching for you for a very long time. I'm sure he would be impressed to see you now. I still recall your wedding day...and your escape with Captain Rackham."

"He's not my husband anymore," she sneered. "And I'd pierce myself on the end of that sword before I let you take me back to 'im either, Captain."

"I'm not here for you, Ann. I'm here for the boy."

Her eyes widened, and he saw the striking resemblance between the two of them. "He really does have your eyes."

"You'll not touch a hair on my boy!"

"I'm sorry, Ann, but you have very little say in the matter."

"And what about me, Rogers?"

They looked up to the stairwell to see Rackham at the rail, two pistols in hand, one pointed at Rogers and one at the guards surrounding his wife. "Should not a father have a say in it?"

This gave the Governor and captain pause as he looked between the two. "You make an interesting

claim. Even more interesting now, when the lad has become of such value. I find that convenient, if not a bit sickening."

"Find it whatever you like, you'll not be leaving here with him."

"If not with him, then with the lot of you in irons. I've warrants for your arrests; in fact that of your entire crew. You face the gallows, Rackham." He looked about then, as if suddenly concerned, "Wait, where is the other one?"

A shot cracked near him, and one of his men fell dead to the floor. Rogers turned his eye to the window to his right and found Mary Read perched at the sill, ready to fire again. "Next one goes in your heart, Rogers. Stand down!"

In an instant, a firefight had erupted within the pub; Roger's men opening fire in retaliation. Rackham shot the man who had a hold onto Bonny, allowing her to wrestle her sword free and strike at the men closest to her. The other pirates, who had been waiting for their chance, leapt into the fray, startling their captors with their quick reflexes and heavy artillery, for it seemed not one man or woman in the place carried with the less than a sword, two guns and a knife. Any who didn't possess a ready weapon, used whatever was at hand, smashing bottles across skulls and faces, breaking chairs and barrels over backs and bludgeoning each other with table legs. Rackham was fighting his way down the stairs as musket armed men tried to surge up it, bayonets ahead of them, but he picked them off one by one, wounding far more than killing.

When his right pistol ran out of shot, he used it instead to beat an advancing young officer in the face, which sent him crashing over the side of the rail and falling to a table below.

Ann came charging behind them, knocking men aside and skewering any that wouldn't yield.

"Where is he?!" she shouted up to Jack, who met her half way, yanking her up three steps before gripping her waist and allowing her to spin and kick at the man who was rushing behind her, sending him bowling into the others, who all tumbled back with yelp as the stairs broke beneath them.

"In the third room on the left; get him and go out the window, Read and I will follow!"

"You had damn well better!" She kissed him roughly and fled, leaving the man with smug grin on his face as he too leapt over the side of the rail, falling on some hapless sailors below.

Ann slammed and barred the door to the lower level before darting down the hall, knowing it would not be long before she was followed and possibly trapped up there. The door to the third room on the left was ajar and she opened it with her sword at the ready, fearing someone might have already gotten there before her.

Her blade was quickly met with another and she was surprised to see whom held it. "State your business," the young man at the other end of Mary's own sword muttered. She gazed at him for a moment in shock, knowing he could only be one person. After a moment, he seemed to recognize her too, for his weapon lowered and he took a step back in surprise, or perhaps fear. "Mother?"

"Yes," she answered her voice suddenly dry. "Yes, Hector."

From below the sound of screams and pistol shot heightened, and Ann knew they were running out of time for escape. "We're under attack we have to go, now. Out the window," she reached for him as if to grab his hand and pull him along, but he drew away from her. "Come on, Hector, there's no time!"

"Then I suggest we make some." He closed and latched the door, heaving the table against it after jamming a candle stick into the handle. She watched him uncertainly, hardly able to believe this strong young man was the infant she'd left behind so many years ago. He had always remained that way in her mind, that little helpless bundle in her arms with the bright blue eyes. What stood before her now was a man; one she had wronged.

He turned to her with measured reluctance, looking her over without meeting her eyes.

"How is it you know my face?" she asked.

"There's a portrait of you in the Captain's rooms. Though you look a might different in it." She chanced another glance at her face, "You're pretty, like they told me."

She smiled at his compliment and attempted to draw closer to him but hesitated. "You must hate me."

The young man frowned deeply in response, but looked more saddened than angry. "I don't have the heart to hate ye," he muttered. "Though I wish I did."

The door rattled on its hinges then, driving the two of them back further into the room. Instinctively Ann reached for him and drew him behind her, which seemed to surprise them both. She looked at Mary's sword in his hand; "Ye know how to use that?"

He nodded; "Just be worrying about yourself."

The door rattled again and again, more violently than before, and finally the wood began to splinter as it was hacked to pieces by an assaulting axe. Gun barrels were pointed through the growing gaps, and the two were forced to drop to the floor and seek cover behind the sparse furnishings. Finally the shattered wood gave way, and three men burst inside, ready to fire further. They were met then by Rogers, who barked at them; "Dammit, I want them taken alive! Hold your fire! I said hold your damn fire!"

Hector peered up from behind the overturned bed, catching a glimpse at the Governor. "Hector, are you hurt?"

"No, but you will be if you don't leave, sir." He warned. "I've got no quarrel with you, and I don't need rescuing, if it's all the same to you."

"I'm afraid I can't leave it at that, son. Your father is looking for you."

Ann made herself known then, raising her gun at the man; "You'll take him over my cold dead body, Woodes. James hasn't got a claim to him or me!"

Rogers looked bitterly irritated, but kept his composure; "Your pirates have slaughtered half my party, and I know well the rest of your rat's nest will be upon us shortly. But you forget that I am every bit as knowledgeable of this jungle and these waters as you, Ann, and I have just as many friends. And if you strike at me now, I will bring the Armada down on your heads. What will your Brethren say then?"

"English scum!"

"Release Hector to me and I will leave. Refuse, and your captain and crew will hang."

"Don't listen to 'im, Annie!" It was Rackham's voice they heard bellowing from below, and she realized with a cringe that they had managed to overpower him, or else the fighting would still be

going on.

"It's a veiled threat. You know we won't let you leave alive." She muttered in return.

"If I don't return, I have left orders for attack. The Navy will come at you from every port, and they will burn this village to the ground if necessary."

"Wait!"

To their shock, Hector stood then, stepping hurriedly between Ann and Rogers's men. "If I go with you, you'll leave them in peace?"

"No, Hector!"

"Yes," Rogers answered seriously, staring from mother to son, "That is something to which I would agree."

"What about yer warrants for their arrests?"

"I will stay their punishment for the time being, and give those who desire it one last chance at clemency. I wish to see no more bloodshed than is necessary. This island has seen too much of it in recent years as it is."

"Then I will go with you."

Ann grabbed him and tried to pull him back, "Don't do this! We outnumber them, we can still escape!"

But her son shook his head at her; "I'm not worth dyin' for, trust me. Besides, I'll be fine on my own. I've managed this long."

"Hector..." She hugged him tightly, crushing him against her, very near tears as she kissed his hair and side of his face, glaring angrily over his shoulder at Rogers, whose twisted face did show some signs of remorse for the regretful situation he had forced them into. When Ann finally let him go with great effort, the young redhead walked calmly to Roger's side, and with the man's hand on his shoulder, they turned and left the ruins of the room behind him. Ann fell to her knees, sobbing angrily.

As they reached the main floor, Rogers gave orders of retreat to his men, sighting that a bargain had been reached between himself and Bonny, and that all parties would be allowed to leave without further harm, or there would be dire consequences.

Jack, who had been beaten and overpowered by six men, his arms shackled behind his back, reached for his son as he moved to follow Rogers out the door. "Hector, wait!"

"Please, I can't—"

Rackham took the boy's right hand in his and placed on his forefinger a ring from his own; the gold and ruby lion. Hector stared at it in shock and shook his head; "W-what are ye, daft? What are ye giving me this for?"

"You know why."

Rogers took Hector's shoulder then and pulled him along, and Rackham watched in growing helplessness as they retreated.



They had come by boat in the dark, and they returned that way, weaving along the dangerous pass through rough current, navigating expertly passed hidden dangers of jagged rock and reef and tide pools which would have stranded them. Hector realized that Rogers must have passed this way many times before to know it so well, and as he stood on the small deck beside him, he asked what others must have long suspected; "You were one of them once, weren't ye?"

"A pirate? Aye, a life time ago it seems like. But I found my way back from that life before it consumed me whole, and I thank God every day for it."

Hector turned his eyes back to dark waters behind him, wondering if anyone was following them. "I'm sorry to put you through that, lad. It couldn't be helped."

"You could have left me be."

"That would be kin to letting you hang yourself." The man with the cane answered. "James wants better for you."

"Did no one ever think to ask what I might want?"

Rogers gave pause as he considered the young man's question. "Son, I realize that this is all very unfair to you. In less than two days you've been torn from your world and thrust into two entirely different ones of which you understand very little. It's my regret that James has chosen to force you to take sides in this matter, but it is something that can't be undone. You should trust that there are those who know better than you."

Hector said nothing to this and remained silent for the rest of the journey, admiring the water and the ring that now donned his finger. A carriage was waiting for them when they reached port, and when they arrived at the steps of the manor house; it's clean white columns and crisps lines surrounded by heavy blooms and ferns and palms such a contrast to where he had just come from, he found James Bonny waiting.

He had no sooner put his foot upon the ground than the man seized him by the arm and drug him forward. "I am extremely displeased with you."

"Let go!"

"James," Woodes called as he approached, brow furrowing at Bonny's rough mistreatment of the son he had previously been so panic-stricken over. "He's had a hard night. I suggest we all get some sleep while there is dark left, and we'll decide what to do in the morning."

"I'm so sorry about this, Woodes," the pale faced man blathered apologetically towards the other, groveling like a dog. "I hope he hasn't inconvenienced you too much this evening, I am ever in your debt--!"

Rogers held up a hand to silence him. "Enough, James. Really, I am very tired and all I want is my chair and cup of tea. Hector," he said then turning towards the younger lad. "If you wish to talk to me further, you may do so in the morning. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, sir."

Woodes limped off as the carriage driver drove away, leaving the two men standing on the steps in the early pre-dawn light. Captain Bonny's formerly gentle expression had vanished, and he glared at Hector now with a towering temper. He looked at his dirty, torn and rumpled clothing, noted the blood stains on his shirt, the glaring welt upon his neck, and the heavy smell of rum on his breath. "I can see that it is going to take a lot more than a lesson in table manners to make something out of

you," he snarled, keeping his grip on the young man's wounded arm as he dragged him into the house.

Hector resisted, confused and frightened by this sudden change. Bonny drug him through the foyer and up the stairs until they reached his rooms, after which he shoved Hector inside. "I'll put bars on the windows if I must!" he warned him. As the boy tried to stumble away, Bonny shook his brutally, striking him several times in the face until he brought blood from his ears and nose, "Why did you leave me!? Why!?"

"Let go of me!"

"You're never going to leave me again, do you hear?! Your whore mother left me, but you won't! I'll kill you first!"

Hector fell to the floor as Bonny stood over him, rasping for breath, his face hard red with beads of sweat standing out on his brow, wild eyed and mad. Hector cowered under him, not understanding, trying to shield himself from another blow. But slowly reason seemed to come back into Bonny's eyes and he righted himself, adjusting his wig and his collar as he took a few composing breaths. "I'm sorry, Hector. I don't know what came over me."

He drifted away, seating himself upon the bed as if in a daze, dabbing at the sweat on his brow, leaving his supposed son where he lay. "You must try to understand how difficult it's been in your mother's absence. We were married for so little time before..." he seemed to shudder at the memory of her betrayal, hands digging into the comforter. "Before that pirate stole her from me."

The boy below him wiped the blood from his nose on his sleeve and stared fearfully up at him, blue eyes strangely bright. Bonny seemed to have a moment of remorse then, for he bent and helped Hector to his feet, wrapping his arms around him and holding him possessively, "You're all I have of her now, the one small piece that remains. Don't you realize how dear you are to me, Hector?"

The quaking youth in his hands nodded dumbly, afraid to say otherwise. But a new sort of fear twisted itself like a coil in his belly. Captain Bonny was suddenly a very different man; a creature warped by abandonment and betrayal and a lust that went unquenched year and after year. He had known his mother such a brief moment, but even he was beginning to see what had transpired to make her choose the path she had.

"Did you see her, Hector? Did you see her with the pirates?"

He searched the young man's bruised face for answers, eyes gleaming with a sort of insane hungry light. Hector shook his head slowly as he lied; "She was not among them. I didn't go looking for her...it was all an accident."

He watched hope fall from the Captain's features, replaced by growing frustration. "You are certain you didn't see her?"

"No." Hector lied again. "I wouldn't know her if I did. How could I?" It was then that Bonny noticed the ring that now adorned his finger. For a second his eyes flashed, and then he returned to his normal calm state. "Very well, Hector. I can see now that there's a stubborn streak in you that has to be broken."

"I don't know what yer talking about," he answered back, readying himself for another onslaught, but it didn't come. Instead the Captain looked almost chillingly composed. "There are consequences to our actions, Hector. To everything we do and say. And your years of savage

upbringing don't seem to have instilled in you the values of this society. So I feel that I must make myself starkly clear on the matter."

He stood up then and marched towards the door, "Clean yourself up and meet me downstairs in fifteen minutes. There is something I think you should see."

Left alone in the dark room, it took Hector nearly that long just to stop shaking. He'd been beaten plenty of times in his young life, but it wasn't just the abuse which made him tremble. It was the sheer murderous intent he'd seen in Captain Bonny's eyes and the depth of his obsession, and the feeling of having the ground pulled out from underneath him. He wished he knew where to turn, that he could find one friendly face among this sea of turmoil he was suddenly haplessly adrift in.

He washed the blood from his face and hands in the wash basin, shed the ripped and ruined shirt and traded it for a clean one he found in the wardrobe replaced his sand filled shoes for sturdy boots, then made his way down the corridor towards the foyer. On route, he paused at the open doors of Roger's office and stepped quickly inside. He wasn't sure what he was looking for exactly, but his eyes scoured the slew of papers that covered the heavy wooden table for some clue. When that yielded nothing, he opened the first drawer and found beneath a few old ledgers something that sparked his interest. It was an old map of the island, with a curious route that seemed to lead away from the beaten paths. It also marked a sea route that lead curiously around the coastline, with notes of dangerous pit falls. This must have been Roger's map to the pirate's secret Cay. He tucked rolled the map and tucked it away inside his shirt and then turned to leave, then paused, taking also a sharpened letter opener from its place and concealing it inside his belt.

When he arrived at the foyer, Captain Bonny was waiting for him. He ushered Hector outside into the same carriage he had ridden only a few minutes ago. "Where are we going?"

"You'll see."

They rode in silence, but the trip's duration was short and their progress slowed by a growing crowd. Hector stared out the windows at the throng, wondering what they had gathered for. Whatever it was, it made the lot rather boisterous for so early in the morning.

"Why don't you have a look?" James said calmly as he gestured towards the door. Hector glared at him and then slowly pushed it open, stepping down to the cobblestone street. Unobstructed by the shadowed confines of the coach, he could see that they had arrived at the gallows at the very edge of the docks. There were three prisoners standing upon the platform, ropes around their necks already as their lists of crimes were being read to the crowd. He did not recognize the first two faces, but the third caused his stomach to drop somewhere between his knees.

"DAYANA!"

She looked up at him, her dirty tear-stained face greeting his. "Hector!"

"...for crimes of piracy against the crown, you are hear-by sentenced to hang by the neck until dead. May God have mercy on your souls."

"Stop! Stop please!" Hector wailed above the crowd, but his pleas went unheard. James stepped out from behind him and waved to the executioner at the lever. There came the sound of banging wood, followed by the gasp of the crowd, the thud of falling bodies and the audible crack of necks being broken. In an instant she had been there, the next she was gone.

Hector screamed, clutching the door for support. Captain Bonny stood stiffly beside him, watching his horror with a sense of dark satisfaction. "This, my son, is the price to be paid for piracy, any

whom put themselves above the law. I hope we understand each other now."

Hector turned away sickly, tears in his eyes, hardly able to catch his breath. He had never seen such senseless death. James brushed his hand along the nape of his neck, twisting his fingers in the damp curls there. "Do you see now, how it must be?" He leaned in and whispered into the shell of his ear, "Tell me where Rackham and she are hiding."

Trembling, he reached into his belt and withdrew the letter opener there before turning upon Bonny like a wild dog. "DAMN YOU!" He was able to drive the blade into the place between the man's neck and shoulder before he was thrown back. The watching guard descended upon the brawl at Bonny's cries and grappled with Hector, who slashed at them blindly before he was dealt a painful blow to the stomach which winded him before having a boot heel collide with his temple that sent him into a heap upon the ground as the crowd cheered this new violence.

Captain Bonny stood gasping and holding the gushing wound upon his neck, his jaw set in a hard angry line as he glared down at his vile offspring. "Take him back to the Governor's. I will deal with him there."

"But, sir, you're wounded!"

"I'll tend to it!" he snarled. He kicked Hector for good measure, "Just get me out of here!" He had no sooner turned to climb back inside the coach when he heard a new cry come up from the crowd. He turned his head painfully to see what this new disturbance was, only to hear the loud boom of canon echo across the bay. A ball struck one of the stone walls at the outermost edges of the dock, sending splinters and debris crashing into the water and dust wafting across the crowd.

"PIRATES!"

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His mind raced as they rattled up the cobblestones, the only sound more deafening than the horses thundering hoof-beats being the sound of canon fire followed by the distant shouts of men and women as they fell under attack. A fine sweat covered his palms and his neck, and his jaw was locked tightly as he grit his teeth, nerves and anticipation bubbling inside of him. He glared down at the body on the floor at his feet, which jostled with the hasty movement of the coach. This may not have been precisely what he had intended when he had first laid eyes upon the young man on the beach, for he had been uncertain even then of his identity, but he had arrived at his ultimate goal none the less.

Woodes raid must have provoked them to attack at last, and they would come, most assuredly, swarming in from the sea like the tide. And she would be among them, searching for her stolen whelp.

He did not give Ann much credit when it came to motherly instincts; she had always had grander things on her mind than baring him children and pleasing him. But she was a woman still, no matter how bare the definition, and she would not wish to see her offspring harmed. He would offer a trade then; the bastard child for her surrender. How could she refuse?

As they reached the front doors, they were greeted by Rogers, who looked deeply disturbed as he gazed down the hill to the coastline below. "James, what is going on?" he called.

“The pirates are attacking, sir! You’d best get inside and barricade yourself in your office. They’ll overwhelm the guard within the hour I’m certain.” He pulled Hector’s limp figure from inside the cabin, which seemed to alarm the Governor even further. “What’s happened to him?”

“I’m afraid he met with some violence at the docks, I got him away as soon as I could—“ James assured, almost too evenly, for Rogers looked at him with hard eyes.

“What was he doing down there to begin with?”

Before Bonny could manage a legitimate fabrication however, there came another roar of canon fire, as now three pirate vessels filled the bay waters, all firing upon the Naval ships put to the docks, keeping their attacks on landfall concentrated to the battlements of the fort walls.

“Get him inside, Bonny, I will deal with them when they come.”

“But Woodes, I have already--!”

“You’ve done enough,” Hissed the older man, leaning heavily upon his crutch. “I warn you, James, that if I find that this was some doing of yours, I will be extremely displeased.” Through his gentlemanly tones, Bonny felt a bit of the real threat that edged his words, and saw some of the old fire that must have been in the man’s eyes long before his battle wounds had laid him low. “Now, where is my bloody musket?”

Not lingering to be further chastised, James carried Hector inside and made his way to his rooms, just as the man began to revive “Get off me! Get off me, ye devil!”

He wrestled with his half-coherent prisoner into the room and allowed him to fall to the rug before turning and baring the door. Hector was up, blindly attacking him, but in his dazed state he was easy to fend off. He gripped his arm, twisting his wrist so he could better see the ring that adorned his finger; “You didn’t think I would notice this little treachery, did you?” he snared. “You think I don’t know this crest, or the bastard to whom it belongs? Looking at you now, I don’t know how I could have mistaken it before. You look far too much like his ill-tempered breed!”

They struggled with each other heatedly for several minutes, Hector swearing and cursing, trying to strike out at whatever bit of the man he could reach, wasting precious energy in the process as Bonny easily avoided any damaging blows and forced the boy face first upon the bed to keep him from any further disobedience. The thrill of dominating someone was something Bonny had always coveted but had rarely been able to achieve. A cowardly and pitiless man, he favored those few who were meeker in spirit or stature than he, which is one reason why he harbored such harsh feelings towards his former wife. Above all things, he should have been able to force his will upon her. Now as he looked at Hector struggling in vain beneath him, already beaten and somewhat exhausted, he saw an opportunity he was not likely to be presented with again.

“I suppose I should be grateful you are so much like your deceitful wretch of a mother. In fact, from this angle, the resemblance is almost uncanny.” He ran his hand down Hector’s back, pulling his shirt down and using it bind his arms in position. This caused the youth to bellow and curse louder, but Bonny drove his face into the mattress and blankets in an attempt to smother out the sound and make him more docile. James leaned over the squirming man and Hector felt him pressing against him as he attempted to pull down his breeches. “In fact, if I close my eyes, there’s hardly a difference at all.”

A new kind of panic sang in him, making his heart race and his muscles clench and tense. This was a new kind of assault that he could barely comprehend, but everything in him screamed out against it.

Luckily, he heard the crack of gunfire over their heads and looked up to see a newly singed hole in the adjacent wall which had knocked Anne's portrait from its place. Bonny jolted and turned towards the door in shock, only to Rogers standing there with a fearsome scowl upon his twisted face. "Take your hands from that boy, Bonny, or you shall require much more than a cane when I have finished with you."

"Sir! You don't understand, I was--!" Hector threw his arm back then and struck the man in the nose, breaking it and sending blood squirting everywhere as he scrambled for freedom. Bonny howled, eyes tearing and trying to stem the bleeding as he groped for the lad, trying to catch him. Rogers fired at him again and the bullet singed Bonny's reaching arm, causing him to yelp and recoil. Hector stumbled to Roger's side and the two retreated the room, closing and barring the door to keep the mad man from coming after them.

"The pirates sir," Hector panted once they were away from the door, "they--!"

"Yes, I know," the governor nodded, bracing Hector under his good arm as they limped down the corridor, past panicked and fleeing staff. "They'll take the port now for sure. Our defenses are feeble at best, and my best gunmen are miles away on errand. You should get clear from here before anything else happens."

"What about you, sir? Will they harm you?"

"They may try. But I can hold my own." He looked sincerely to the young man then, "I am so sorry this has happened to you, my lad. I always suspected what Bonny was, but I never knew the depth of his madness."

They were interrupted then by approaching gun fire, and knew that the pirates had taken the harbor and were making their way up hillside towards the mansion. "Hector, you can't be caught here. Go! Run into the jungle, find your parents if you can and get away from here."

The red-haired man nodded mutely and helped him to the stairs, only to have the door come crashing down below them, the bandits cutting off the fleeing staff with fear of quick death by sword or bullet. "You there! Surrender!" One called from below, pointing his pistol towards the top of the steps at the two of them.

Rogers aimed his own in return. "I would ask the same of you, sir! You do not know with whom you are dealing with. Stand down, or I'll fell four or more of you before you get so much as a shot off. You see I have the clear advantage of the high ground, and that my powder is not nearly as damp from the surf you've just come up from."

They seemed a little stunned, and for a moment did nothing but blink up at them. It was Hector then, who waved his arms. "Listen, I'm a friend of Ann Bonny and Jack Rackham! Don't shoot, for God's sake!"

"Wot's he on about?"

"For fuck sakes, Bones, lower your weapon." Ann's voice could be heard coming across the threshold as she forced her way through the cluttered entry. "Hector! Are you alright?!"

"Aye, with a bit of help," the youth nodded to Rogers, who offered him a crooked smile.

The momentary lull was quickly abated however, but the sound of another shot and sudden spray of blood which came from the Governor's chest. He made a helpless yelp and pitched to the side, only managing to catch himself on the rail before collapsing upon the stair case. Hector cried out

and made to reach for him but a knife was at his throat before he could move.

“One more step and he dies!” James’s shrill, angry voice pitched above them, making Ann and the other pirates jerk to a halt.

“Bonny...you traitor...” Rogers wheezed from the stairs. “Let the lad go...it’s over.”

“Not while she’s still alive!” the captain screeched, glaring down with hell fire at the red haired woman who gawked up at him, frightened and full of hatred. “Did you think I’d let some woman best me in the end, Annie my dear? Did you really believe that, even for a second, that I would let you go while you still had breath in your body?”

“God damn you, James! I should have killed you on our marriage bed!”

The Captain snarled at the sight of her and pressed the blade a little closer to Hector’s skin, drawing a thin line of blood. “Surrender! Surrender yourself now or I’ll bleed him dry.”

“You murderous coward!”

“NOW, ANN!”

“This was begun by you and I, James! Let us finish it that way!” she bellowed back, drawing her sword instead and stepping forward to openly challenge him to a duel.

He gawked at her for a moment and then laughed somewhat nervously. “You are bold as you ever were, my dear wife. Very well! If it is a duel you want, a duel you shall have.” He leered at restless crew behind her. “But you’ll have to call off your scalawags. Have them put their weapons down. Careful, Captain! My hand might just slip across your pretty whelp’s throat.” His fingers squeezed Hector’s flesh and made it crawl and he squirmed in his hold, not caring if he cut himself in the process.

“Temper, temper child! You wouldn’t want to break your mother’s heart now would you? At least, not before I have a chance to cut it out myself.”

“Release him, James!”

“And what promise do I have that you’ll keep your word if I do and the battle shall remain between us?”

“I swear it by the Code.”

“Annie, no!” someone behind her gasped, but she silenced them. “I give my word. Now let him go.”

James pondered this for a moment and then removed the knife from Hector’s throat, only to give him a sharp push down the stairs that sent him rolling and skidding. Ann cursed him and moved tend to her son, but James shouted at her to let him lay where he had fallen. He drew his sword and moved towards her, all too eager for battle.

Ann smirked at him bitterly, for James had always been sure of himself with a sword. But he had forgotten that she was a far better swordsman than he, and her skill had only improved over her long years at sea.

They met each other with a great clash of steel, Bonny already ignoring the rules of engagement and fighting like a mad dog, slashing out at her with great strength and speed but very little focus or

agility. His aim seemed to be to slice her head from her shoulders.

Ann kept him at bay with her skillful strikes, but found his speed daunting. She tried instead to back him up the staircase, where his footing would be less sure and she could gain the upper hand. “You forgot that I always bested you in fencing, James!” she snarled at him, taking the opportunity to slice a bit of his shirt open and draw a line of blood from his belly which made him shriek before she did the same to his face. “You never wanted to admit that I was your equal! Well, now I am so much more than that!” She kicked him and knocked him back against the steps, leaving him lying winded at her feet with his sword discarded. She flicked her rapier beneath his chin and leered down at him. “Beg me for mercy, husband dear. Tell me why I should not kill you where you lie?”

There came shouts and gunfire from outside then that drew their attention and the pirates turned to see that the navy had indeed caught up with them, and that their defenses outside were swiftly being overwhelmed. Ann turned to call orders to her crew, only to feel the sudden sharp stab of a sword through her back.

She dropped and fell, clutching the bleeding exit wound as she rasped for air. On the steps behind her, Bonny laughed hideously as gunfire exploded the windows of the foyer and glass shattered somewhere above them in the upper halls.

Hector, who had come around before, stared at his wounded mother as the Captain cackled, having forgotten all about him. The youth felt nothing but a burning hatred inside him, and he fumbled upon the ground for a discarded weapon. He found Roger’s fallen gun, which he lifted then, pulled back the hammer and fired squarely into Bonny’s chest. The man gagged and gurgled, blood pouring from the large bullet wound and laid there, gaping at the shooter.

Around them the world seemed to burn, and Hector barely became aware of the smell of smoke coming from the upper rooms of the mansion or the sound of footsteps thundering down upon them from above.

Bonny coughed and continued to gawk at him, “You’ve murdered me...” he mumbled. Hector knew this was true then; he’d killed the man and perhaps the strangest thing about it was that he felt no horror, no remorse. Hate embraced him and set his senses on fire, extinguishing pity. Killing was simple, he realized, when you have the proper motivation.

He pulled the hammer on the pistol back again and would have fired directly into Bonny’s head, had arms not come around him, pulling him back. He was being dragged down the stairs by an officer, and he struggled to get free, remembering Ann and reaching out to help her.

Looking around in the blur, he saw bright orange flames that were now licking at the edges of tapestries, and horrible black smoke that was filling the air, flushing out the hidden servants and plundering pirates that had infiltrated the upstairs rooms. They joined the chaos on the stairs, many just fleeing for their lives from the flames, while others continued to join in battle.

Whoever had hold of Hector was knocked away and he fell to the ground, stumbling his way back towards where Ann lay motionless on the stairs. Rogers, amazingly still alive, had made his way down the staircase and grappled with him. “We must get out!” Hector thought he heard him say, but the sound around him had become like a crashing wave and he could barely distinguish one voice from another.

A familiar faced joined them, and Rackham, whom seemed to have taken some injuries as well, was beside him, grabbing Hector by the arm and pushing him towards the door as he lifted Ann up and ushered them towards safety. Rogers hobbled along beside them and they stumbled together out into the open air, where pirate and privateer mixed and mingled in the chaos, simply trying to



escape the smoke and the flames. The jungle around them was burning now too it seemed, and the high winds from the shore fanned the flames.

The heat was staggering, the smoke more so. Hector groped through the chaos, just trying to get ahead of it, blindly lead by Rackham and a handful of crewmen. The pirate captain lead them down a sandy trail where they disappeared beneath the dark heavy leaves of the palms and were soon consumed by the forest, leaving the panic and chaos behind them.

In a daze they came to a stop at the foot of a hill where a little waterfall fell and Rackham paused to lay Ann down on the grass and look her over. "Annie? Annie, m'luv, look at me now, let me see those Irish eyes of yours. Dammit woman, don't you leave me here alone, I'll never forgive ye!" He cooed and cursed at once, and Ann only smiled feebly, flirting with consciousness as he examined the wound.

Hector watched them helplessly, Rogers collapsed at his side, not knowing what to do or say. He was dazed and trembling, blood still rushing in his ears from the battle. Ann beckoned him to her and he went, clasping her freckled white hand in his. "I'm sorry," was all he could manage, for words had lost themselves on their way to his lip.

She smiled at him and just nodded, drawing him in and kissing his brow before whimpering and going quiet again. Jack fussed over her for a little while longer and then sat back with his hand over his face and heaved a heavy sigh. "I don't know that I can save her. At least not like this."

"Surely there must be a doctor among you. Can't we go back to the village and find someone?"

"I'm not sure we have the time, lad."

"Well we have to try, don't we?!" he replied in exasperation. "I'll carry her if you can't, ye looked burned. It's not so far, you can show me the way!" he reached to scoop Ann up, but Jack bade him be still.

"Hush, lad, and let it be for now. Someone's coming."

Hector looked back up over the hill and tried to see who was stirring on the path above them. Jack gripped his pistol and held his breath and Hector did the same, but a friendly face emerged from the thicket.

"Jack! There you are, you devil! I thought you were dead!" It was Mary Read, who had somehow evaded the navy and the fires completely, for she had come around from the south to lead an ambush, only to find everything had gone straight to hell. "Annie!"

The woman's shocked screech was heartbreaking to the men as she discovered her wounded lover upon the ground and dropped beside her, gathering her up and kissing her face and hair. Jack tried to explain but his voice was hoarse from the smoke.

"We've got to get her back to the village, but the roads will be watched. I've burned my legs, I can't make it quite so far alone. We need help." He looked back at Hector and Rogers, not knowing what to do and not wanting to seem as hopeless as he felt then.

To their surprise, for they had almost forgotten him, Rogers spoke up then; "I have a ship waiting..." he rasped, his voice frail and fading. "It's waiting off the harbor at Gull's Reef, just a mile or so down the coast. She's been waiting for me, ready to sail. Go, take the boy and get out of this place."

"Sir, what about you?"

"I'm finished." Rogers shuddered, but he smiled vaguely. "But it is an end long awaited. I wish you good luck, Hector. You've shown me spirit that I've long forgotten that man could possess. You'll make a fine sailor." The young man sat with the Governor until he faded, and then Jack was ushering him to his feet and the two of them limped after Mary, leaving the old man where he lie.

They reached the beech just before midday, watching a storm boil and roll in over the horizon with dark heavy rain clouds that would soon put out the flames on the island above. They found the ship sitting just where Rogers had promised, but Jack and Mary hesitated on approach, much to the exhausted Hector's consternation. "What are you waiting for! She's dying, we have to get help! Surely they have a doctor aboard, we just have to explain—"

"Explain what, exactly?" Jack muttered in replied, his humor long forgotten. "We don't exactly have a signed statement from the deceased governor giving us authority over their ship; and in the shape we're in, I doubt we could fight. We shall have to think of another way." He looked to Mary and Ann and asked; "How is she?"

"Holding fast, but I don't know for how long." The Captain and his mate exchanged conversation in silence, speaking with their eyes what they could not bring themselves to voice.

Hector fidgeted restlessly behind the rocks where they crouched, ready to scream for help and growing more frustrated by the minute. He felt Jack's hand on his shoulder then, "Forgive me, son." He said heavily and sincerely, drawing Hector in tightly for a moment before pushing him back, drawing back his fist and striking him hard and fast in the face. Hector stumbled and swung back feebly before Jack clouted him again and sent him into the sand.

"What are you doing?!" Mary screeched.

"Giving him a chance! If I can convince these idiots that we're villagers, they'll take him to safety across the channel. I'll bring a doctor back here if I can, if not, you take Annie and make for the village. Don't worry about me."

"You can't Jack, you just can't!"

"If he's caught, they'll hang 'im!" the man cried, barely keeping his voice low enough to avoid attention. Mary saw how desperate he was. "This is no life for him, Mary...I have to save him. If I can't save her...I have to least save my boy."

He grabbed up the fallen youth then, having stripped himself of his jacket and anything too telling about his appearance, and stumbled out into the open with him, waving down the ship's men that stood upon the dock. Several men came rushing out to greet him curiously.

"Help! Help! God, please help!"

"What's happened man?" called the midshipman as they rushed to greet the flailing man. "My son! He was injured in the pirate attack upon the port! I managed to get us this far away, but they are coming after us! Please, take him aboard, take him to safety!"

"What of the governor? Who are you?"

"The Governor is dead," Jack rasped, and he showed the men his burns. "The town is burning... please, I was just a humble servant in his household, but he would not want to see the last of my family perish. I'm lost. Please, take my son."

The captain of the ship, whom had come to join them upon the dock, nodded. "We have a doctor aboard who could look at your wounds. Come with us, we will go around and see if we can pick up

any survivors from the shore.”

“I can’t travel,” Calico Jack moaned, dropping to the ground. “If you would but leave your doctor here for a moment, I know others have followed us. That way, he might tend to the injured, while the rest of your crew searches for survivors. But you must leave while you can, soon the port will be overrun.”

“Perhaps that is best. Doctor Mallory will stay here. Remain calm, sir, we will return for you with your son.”

Jack only nodded as he handed the boy over to the sailor with one last fleeting look of goodbye and then bowed his head and waited there on the dock for assistance. He watched the sloop sail away around the rocks, gliding out into the open water, knowing it was unlikely that it would ever return. Surely they would see how badly the port was outnumbered and retreat to one of the neighboring islands to wait for the navy to arrive.

By then, they would be long gone.

“Goodbye, Hector. Until we meet again.”

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